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Final Thesis

**The Elephants
in the Room**

An ecolinguistic analysis of the
story of China's wandering herd
between 2020 and 2021

Supervisor

Ch. Prof. Daniele Brombal

Assistant supervisor

Ch. Prof. Stefano Malavasi

Graduand

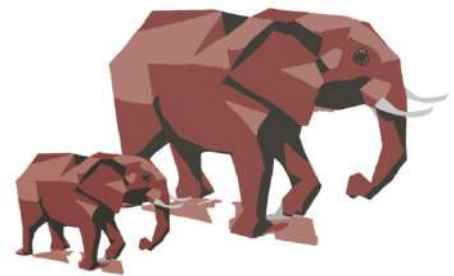
Britt Elvira Ruitenberg

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“A chance for non-human stakeholders to sit at the table”



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FINAL THESIS

The Elephants in the Room

An ecolinguistic analysis of the story of China's wandering herd between 2020 and 2021

Britt Elvira Ruitenberg
884755

Abstract: While the world had its eye on the coronavirus pandemic, a herd of 15 elephants began a silent trek in China that would rapidly become a story followed by the entire world. Their journey of over 1,000 kilometres between 2020 and 2021 triggered the interest of an international audience and caused perplexity among experts. Unlike other animal migrations, this event managed to overcome triviality and reach for the headlines, with its coverage shifting from a random case of rogue animals to a human-celebrated success of multispecies coexistence. Such a two-sided portrayal has significant consequences, especially if we consider the role stories and texts play in human ecology to the extent they influence human behaviour. This paper analyses the reporting of the three Chinese media outlets *CGTN*, *China Daily* and *Global Times*, and adopts a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach to examine the frame these constructed around the event. As an exercise of ecolinguistics, the following dissertation aims to understand the type of story this turned into and how the discourse used can affect the ecology: what significance does it have beyond the simplicity of a migration, and what consequences does it carry on how humans interact with each other and the larger natural world. It will look into the emphasis on new forms of harmony, conservation biology challenges, and unfolding reactions to the Anthropocene. Finally, in view of the particularity of this movement, the paper turns to the field of ethology to assess this species' behaviour and identify the lessons we can learn from it. By observing the stories written around and resulting from this journey, *The Elephants in the Room* presents itself as an example of environmental communication. Its goal is to highlight an event that thanks to reporting, writing, video and photography, has become a story with the potential to shape our lives, if not the lives of other-than-human animals.

Keywords: elephant trek; climate change migration; China conservation biology; human-animal coexistence; ecolinguistics approach; ethology

1. Preface

Texts are ubiquitous in our lives. We see, read, and are inundated by words every waking moment, in one form or another, often without even realising it. Texts leave strong impressions in the way we perceive the reality around us – they have the capacity to frame how we interpret and understand it. In the field of media and journalistic reporting, the portrayal of reality takes another turn and is further accentuated as a result of the selection process that goes behind it, that is, the process of choosing what is reported and put under the international and national spotlights over what is left out, considered rather less significant and not worthy of media coverage.

On August 2021, the American news outlet *TIME Magazine* published a story deemed interesting and important enough to include in its *The Brief* section. The article was about the migration of 15 elephants across China and how their journey had “captivated the globe”. This particular event was considered relevant enough to be placed in one of the magazine’s first pages, given editorial preference over global cybercrime and racial inequality in the United States of America. The editorial significance, however, is not what **triggered** the most attention but rather the argumentation of the story itself, and specifically the headline that opened it: “China’s herd of wandering elephants may be climate-change migrants” (Campbell, 2021a).

Between geographical context, poetical action and a potential categorisation appears a modal verb of possibility. A roughly 700-words article stands on a probability and textual uncertainty, an uncertainty that is further hinted to in the piece with related phenomena to climate change – environmental degradation, habitat loss, drought – but not directly repeated as such and always under a hypothetical umbrella. Climate change migration is rapidly forgotten.

After reading this article it became a **personal curiosity and academic interest** to better understand if, indeed, it was climate change related, but also to see how far this event went and the significance of it beyond its *mere* cause. How many headlines did it reach, what actions came from it, and what was this really about. Why did they become so famous and why was this a migration like any other? These questions steered curiosity and brought to wonder whether their *fame* could lead to more significant outcomes, if any.

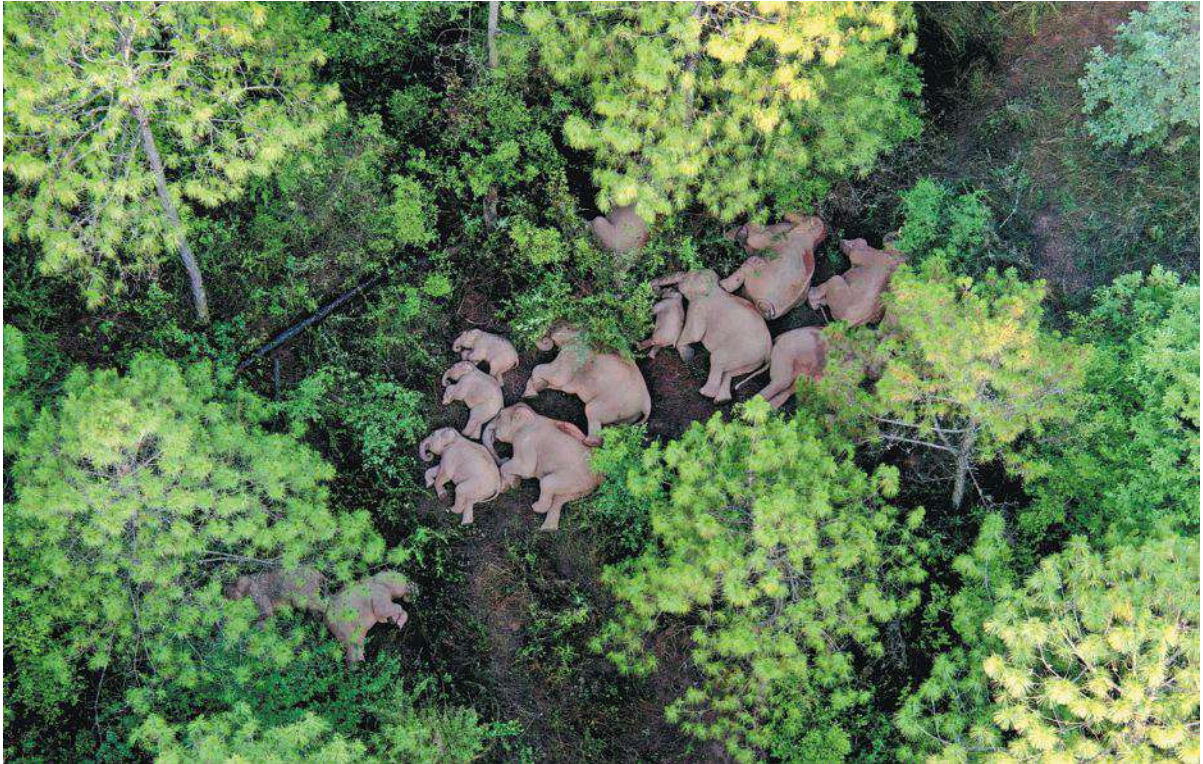


Figure 1: Roaming elephants rest near Xiangnan village, Yuxi city, Yunnan province, on June 13. [Photo by Duan Mengchao/For China Daily]

The way in which it was told resonated across the globe with their story being consumed by renowned international and national media outlets. Something as trivial as an animal migration filled the pages of newspapers and magazines, perhaps as clickbait material to be consumed, perhaps as a story reflecting the systemic changes affecting the world today.

What was immediately clear is that the migration of these 15 elephants in China was an event difficult to ignore. Moreover, it raised a question that at the time was left unanswered and it opened a debate about climate change migration taken out of the human-centred approach while also reemphasising and embracing traditional values on coexistence and harmony in both the country and beyond. Their track became an obvious issue that needed tackling. It introduced many controversial questions: where did they come from, where were they going, why did they leave, and how to manage their return. Their story allowed to put the spotlight on hot topics in the country such as biodiversity and human and animal coexistence while also opening up conversations on climate change and conservation biology challenges. All of these were already present issues that had been neglected or underrated as a subject for discussion but their journey across the country had made it impossible not to address, not anymore.

The Brief

WORLD

China's herd of wandering elephants may be climate-change migrants

By Charlie Campbell/Shanghai

IT'S A WILDLIFE EXPEDITION THAT HAS CAPTIVATED THE globe: a herd of 15 rogue elephants trekking more than 300 miles from their home in Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve, near China's border with Laos. On their journey, they have pilfered from grain stores, scooped mountains of corn and pineapples, and caused over \$1 million of damage as they amble slowly through farmland and villages.

The elephants' antics have been highly engaging. Millions across China—and all around the world—have followed 24-hour livestreams shot by a dozen swarming drones. One popular stream showed a calf trying to clamber out from under a snoozing adult during a group nap; another calf, trying to drink water, plunged headfirst into a pond. Particularly popular footage showed some of the herd appearing drunk after feasting on fermented grain.

The herd's odyssey began in March last year when 16 elephants were seen moving from the reserve; within a month they had reached Yuanjiang County, about 230 miles north of their starting point. Nobody is clear why the herd set out on this unprecedented trek. Some suggest environmental degradation may have spurred them; others believe they are simply lost.

Professor Josh Plotnik, an expert in elephant psychology at Hunter College, City University of New York, tells *TIME* that they likely left because of habitat loss and increasing human disturbance, which may have led to decreasing availability of food and water. Elephants can eat 200 kg (440 lb.) of food every day, and much of their traditional habitat near Xishuangbanna has been turned over to rubber plantations.

"The individual personalities of the elephants in this group [may have] contributed to their decision to leave," says Plotnik. "It is also likely that once the elephants got a taste for the high-quality food readily available in crop fields, such as sugarcane, they continued to seek it out."

THE HERD'S VIRAL FAME has brought a greater awareness of environmental problems to a nation that, despite great strides, remains the world's worst polluter. Conservationists are now trying to leverage that to ensure that real change can come from the elephants' plight—not least as they appear to be heading toward the city of Kunming, where China is hosting a U.N. biodiversity conference in October. (*Human-wildlife coexistence* has already been added to its agenda.)

"We cannot ignore the effect of rapid development of the local economy on the loss of wildlife habitat," Professor Zhang Li, a renowned expert on Asian elephant migration at Beijing Normal University, wrote on his Weibo page. "Clear waters and green mountains are as valuable as mountains of gold and silver. A healthy and complete ecosystem is the cornerstone of sustainable economic development."

Environmentalists are also calling for the Chinese govern-



^
The roving herd, in China's southwestern Yunnan province, on June 20

ment to set up dedicated elephant nature reserves like the successful ones created for pandas and snow leopards. Given that the price of rubber is extremely low, buying back land from farmers is also a possibility.

China's wild elephants have doubled in number to more than 300 since the 1990s, but their habitat has shrunk by nearly two-thirds over the same period. Though China has extremely harsh penalties for those caught killing elephants, the combination of these factors means that the potential for human-elephant conflict will only rise. "We hope that elephants can recover their populations in their historic range," Becky Shu Chen, from the IUCN Asian Elephant Specialist Group, told state broadcaster CGTN. "But it's extremely challenging [for them to] coexist with people."

"The big fear is that the intensity of conflict between humans and elephants can start as just a nuisance and quickly grow to the point where people or elephants get killed," says Plotnik. "This is already happening in some countries in Asia, and spells a dire future for elephants if we don't reverse the trend." □

Figure 2: Printed Article by *TIME* Magazine on the elephants' migration in China.

2. Introduction

This seemingly isolated event in China is worth making a case about because it reminds readers and the public at large of the impact stories can have on the environment and our relationship with it. To decipher the true meaning of a story, one must look at something as specific as word choices and discourse practices in a given context. By making linguistics relevant to overarching contemporary issues such as animal migration and climate change, we can start to re-read the reality we occupy and rethink how we interact with it. The importance of language, its use and its impact on our surroundings is the basis on which *ecolinguistics* stands and is the linguistic paradigm that this dissertation relies on.

Linguistics provides the tools to analyse the texts that surround us in everyday life and shape the kind of society we belong to. However, it is equally important to search for new forms of language that, for example, can inspire people to protect the natural world rather than continue destroying it. By focusing on this approach, we can uphold pathways for human-nature connectedness that may even be a precondition for bringing about transformative change. It sometimes requires an out-of-the-box event to bring things into perspective, and these elephants did not fall short of becoming an eye-opener.

As a story itself, the present dissertation is **structured** in three parts: an introduction, a plot and an (open) ending sequentially titled *narrative*, *the story* and *outcomes*. It will follow a dynamic evolution by employing active verbs starting from an *observation* of the event in question, continued by an in-depth *reflection* of the type of story this is, its meaning and implications, and conclude by paying attention to the *action(s)* resulting from it.

The opening chapter of this paper, **the Narrative**, will *observe* the tale covered by media outlets and look into the buzz generated from a mediatic point of view. An accurate analysis would require looking at the stories and reporting from within, that is, journalistic coverage in Chinese. But, due to language constraints, this paper will only rely on English content yet written by Chinese reporters for Chinese media outlets that write and print in English for an international audience. These are: the English-language daily newspaper *China Daily*, the state-run English-language news channel based in Beijing, China, *CGTN* (China Global Television Network), and the daily tabloid newspaper *Global Times* which comments on international issues from a nationalistic perspective. We will also pay attention to the site *China Dialogue*, an independent organisation dedicated to promoting a common understanding of China's urgent

environmental challenges, which we will consider more for the third part of this paper. All of these Chinese outlets create and publish their own content as well as share releases from the media news agency *Xinhua*, which will not be thoroughly analysed due to the limited access to its online archive and because most of its content is already available in the other sources, from where it has been reviewed.

In addition, to make the case for international relevance and consumption, this paper also refers to a couple of examples of reporting done in English by other-than-Chinese media outlets (in some cases by Chinese correspondents although not exclusively) and mentions a couple of national newspapers across European countries to diversify, but only to provide examples and find commonalities across the globe.

Because the event's context and social conditions are so significant, we will employ the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) paradigm as the method to analyse the narrative constructed by reporters. In concrete, we will pay attention to several aspects of CDA: identity, topicalization, transitivity (with a particular focus on agency), vagueness (looking at modality and omission), temporality and connotation. These will constitute the basis which will allow us to delimit the frame of the story to understand how it has been presented, from what perspective, by who and about what. Firstly, the paradigm allows us to individualise the aspects that were emphasised (explicit) while also identifying those aspects that were left out or unclear (implicit). Secondly, these linguistic categories bring forward elements that constitute a foundation for further analysis. They lay the ground to determine the uniqueness and agency of this event ontologically, with particular attention to the ecological implications of this event.

Envisioned as the plot, the second part, **the Story**, *reflects* and looks into the topics and expressions in the reporting from the selected English-written articles from Chinese media outlets (i.e. *Global Times*, *CGTN*, *China Daily*) to understand the type of story this event constitutes. Combining the factual information with the CDA approach, we can identify the frame built around this particular elephant migration and hence identify the implicit story this case has created as a result of its coverage. In what way was this event used to convey another story and how did the attention shift along the way? These are some of the questions to address.

The conclusions drawn from both the discourse analysis and the story identification will help us define the significance of this happening beyond the simplicity of a migration. The (open) ending will act on **the Outcomes**. This part looks into the influence this case had and can

still have on environmental reporting, human-animal coexistence, conservation biology in the country and/or beyond, and emerging ethology.

By observing the stories written around this event, this project presents itself as an exercise of environmental communication. As summarised by Tema Milstein, Associate Professor of Environment & Society at the University of New South Wales (2009), the concept of *environmental communication* is concerned with the ways people communicate about the natural world because there is a strong belief that such communication has far-reaching effects at a time of largely human-caused crises.

The Elephants in the Room aims to highlight an event that thanks to reporting, writing, video and photography, has become a story with the potential to shape our lives, if not the lives of other-than-human animals.

3. Context review

As an endangered species, the Asian elephant ranks high in biodiversity and conservation discussions. Ever since it was listed as a class I protected wildlife species in China in 1988 (Zhang, 2007), research has paid attention to the conditions and survival of this animal. The increased attention has gone hand in hand with the changes their environment has experienced in the last decades – from the expansion of rubber plantations and crop cultivations around their habitats to the impacts of global warming and food shortages.

In parallel and as a measure to counteract these impacts, **biodiversity conservation has become a priority for the country**. In the past decades, especially since 2010, China has made great strides in their efforts to protect and restore biodiversity and ecosystems, and address conservation challenges at home. But despite great achievements that have attracted worldwide attention, there are still contradictions between economic development and biodiversity conservation (Wang et al., 2020).

When it comes to providing an overview of the environmental history in China and better understanding the background of today's context, the book *The Retreat of the Elephants* (2004) by China scholar and historian Mark Elvin is among the most celebrated. The book spans four thousand years ago, for when there are written records, but is mainly weighted toward the last thousand. Not only does it provide insight into the roots of China's present-day environmental crisis, but it also offers the reader an overview of the views and feelings of Chinese people toward their environment and their landscape across history. Furthermore, these pages offer

a glimpse of the first human impacts on Asian elephant habitats and an initial account of what would continue to unfold years later: the spread of the Chinese style of farming, the destruction of most of the forests, the impacts of war on the landscape, and the re-engineering of the countryside through gigantic water-control systems (Elvin, 2004).

Following this piece as the backbone to understanding China's environmental changes and **human-elephant conflict**, several research papers have been published since. Scientific literature has mainly focused on addressing the linkages between the rapid decline of the Asian elephant population and habitat loss and fragmentation due to land-use changes in the last decades (Zhang et al., 2015). These have identified how the lack of landscape connectivity and the creation of artificial barriers have ultimately inhibited elephant migration in southwestern China, which is the area where most Asian elephants reside (Liu et al., 2018).

Consequently, conflicts between humans and elephant populations have become more frequent. According to significant literature, these conflicts are phenomena that have existed for more than 20 years, yet the increasing anthropogenic pressure on their habitats has exacerbated these tensions (Li et al., 2018), creating even more pressure for local authorities to act and the scientific community to investigate the implications and causes of these kinds of encounters.

In 2020, another chapter in the Asian elephant history opened. A herd of 15 elephants from Xishuangbanna, in southwestern China, embarked on a trek that exceeded expectations and broke with known, studied patterns. The expert community had no explanation to justify such a rare movement and it was not until two years later (around December 2022 and January 2023) that the first scientific papers would be released, revealing data and a clearer understanding of the context in which it took place and triggered it.

Before taking a look at those papers and their findings, we take a step back to assess the impact this case had because the exceptionality of this event is twofold: the herd's journey was a highlight in the species' history with significant impacts on conservation practices, and it was also shaped as a story with strong socio-cultural repercussions.

To better understand the particularities of this event, we will provide the context by answering the Five Ws commonly used in the field of journalism. These are the five questions whose answers are considered basic in information gathering and problem-solving: What, When, Where, Who and Why.

For more than a year, a herd of 15 Asian elephants lumbered its way across China, starting in March 2020 until December 2021, travelling more than 1,400 kilometres through villages, forest patches, agricultural fields, farms and cities. They departed from their habitat in Mengyang National Nature Reserve in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Southwest China's Yunnan Province, on the far southwestern border with Laos, and reached the edges of the city of Kunming in the summer of 2021.

According to state news agency *Xinhua*, the journey appeared to have begun when a total of 16 elephants were seen leaving their home in Xishuangbanna on March 15th, 2020, and moving northward toward the city of Pu'er, a city of 2.5 million in the southern Yunnan Province, which they reached in July 2020.

At first, the herd's behaviour did not trigger any alarms – elephants have large home ranges and movement is quite normal for this species. Moreover, half way 2020 the world had its eye on another concern involving the spread of the coronavirus pandemic. It was not until later that year that researchers and government officials started to notice just how far this herd had actually wandered.



Figure 3: A herd of wild elephants walk in Yimen county, Yuxi, Yunnan province, on June 16, 2021. [Photo/YUXI PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU]

Between December 2020 and April 2021, the elephants migrated from Mojiang County, an autonomous county under the jurisdiction of Pu'er City, to the vicinity of Yuanjiang County, in Yuxi City, about 370 kilometres north of their starting point. By then, three elephants had decided to return home while the other continued roaming in Xinping County, as reported by the commanding officer in charge of monitoring the migration. In addition, two new calves had been born *en route*. The group eventually consisted of 15 animals, including six female adult elephants (one of them the leader), three male adults, three sub-adults and three cubs.

In Yuxi City, the elephants even adventured into the town of Eshan on May 27th, 2021, and walked the streets for six hours after authorities evacuated pedestrians and vehicles and warned residents to stay indoors. They were spotted by multiple street cameras and drones monitoring them all night. Towards the end of May 2021, they were found in several areas in Yuxi City, entering through Hongta District and then at the junction of Luohe Township and Dayingjie Street in Hongta District. While crossing these areas, staff used food to guide the elephants away from the most crowded parts of the cities.

On June 2nd, 2021, the elephants eventually reached the outskirts of Kunming City, despite efforts from police to lure them back home. They entered through Jinning District but soon changed direction, heading 6.6 kilometres southwest instead of northwards. Between June 6th and 17th, the herd wandered around, adapting to thunderstorms and resting halfway. One adult male elephant even left the group and moved away, staying in the forests of Anning, a county-level city under the jurisdiction of Kunming, while the herd of 14 elephants left Kunming City and entered Yimen County in Yuxi City on June 8th. In mid-June, the herd was seen weaving around a small area of Shijie Township in Yuxi City and then entering Dalongtan Township of Eshan County in the city of Yuxi at 9:48 p.m. on June 17th (2021, August 9). Progressively, authorities continued to lure the herd southwards and after weeks of guidance they eventually managed to bring the group back to their native habitat in the south on August 12th, 2021, and reached Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve on December 9th, 2021.

During their 17-month journey, the elephants crossed all kinds of landscapes. They passed through eight counties in the Yunnan province, trotted down the middle of a narrow county street, past a shuttered car dealership with gawking residents on all sides, scoffed mountains of corn and pineapples and went inside stores filled with grains left over from fermentation, leading to reports of at least two drunken elephants. Throughout their journey, they caused nearly one million euros of damage as they ambled through farmland and villages.

In Yuxi alone, for example, the elephants caused damage to more than 400 households, mainly to economic crops such as bananas and corn.

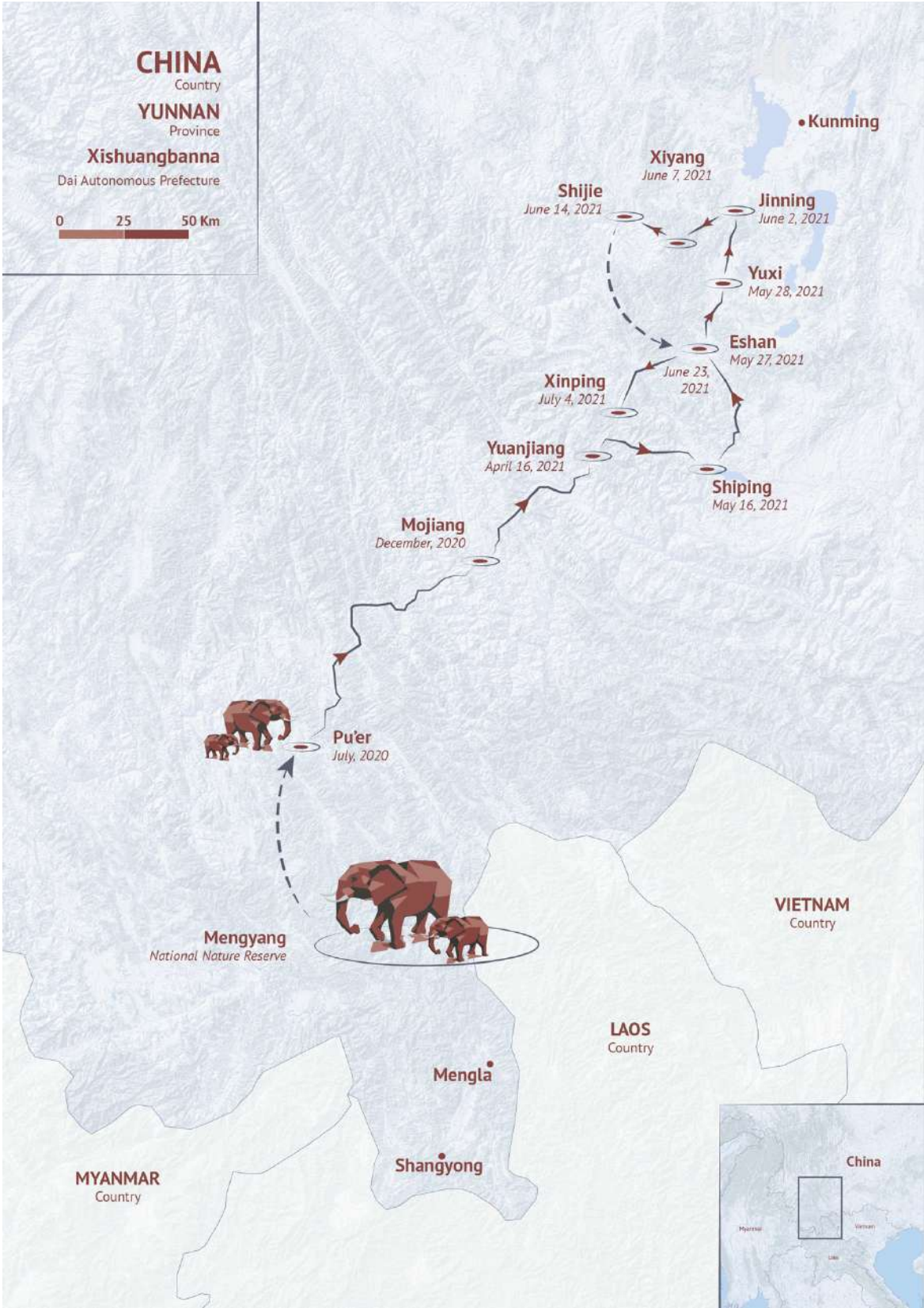


Figure 4: Map illustrating the herd's route from Mengyang's sub-reserve until the outskirts of Kunming [Own production].

The group of so-called *wandering elephants* caught the attention of local authorities because they were *escaping* their delimited areas and entering the human domain, passing through densely populated areas. Therefore, a special task force was set up to closely follow the animals in a bid to prevent any conflict with people, protect the group, monitor their trek, and guide and plan their return.

This special task force, mainly made of the Yunnan Forest Fire Brigade along with other experts and researchers, was named a team of “elephant runners” or “elephant chasers”. From the beginning, the monitoring group closely followed the herd but it was not until the animals started marching toward the city centre in Eshan county in late May 2021, almost 400 kilometres north of the nature reserve, that it became an “all-hands-on-deck” kind of situation.



Figure 6: Firefighters set up a temporary headquarters in Xiangnan village, Yuxi, Yunnan, to monitor the elephants via drones. [Photo by Wei Xiaohao/China Daily]



Figure 6: Forestry workers monitor the elephants [Photo Xinhua]

These men, who were originally firefighters, took the equipment traditionally employed for typical emergencies like firefighting and disaster relief and used it to follow the elephants. In an interview with reporter Yang Jinghao from *CGTN* (2021, June 16), they explained how they used the drones usually employed to track wildfires and put them in action to monitor the herd and to warn local governments and villagers about their trail and help guide them toward safer routes. The monitoring team also adopted other various countermeasures, ensuring the elephants did not drop out of contact. Large topographic relief and many obstructions in the forests were unfavourable factors that interfered with UAV (Unmanned Aerial Vehicle) monitoring, so they combined speaker guidance with UAV monitoring to track the elephants accurately.

Over the course of four months, the task force accompanied the elephants on their journey of hundreds of kilometres, observing and recording, and ultimately helping them return home. With the support of the local government in both Yuxi and Kunming cities, they dispatched a total of 675 emergency workers and police officers, 196 dump trucks, excavators and other engineering vehicles to block roads into villages, 12 drones, 68 emergency vehicles, and evacuated 1,074 households and 3,420 people. In Kunming alone, they even prepared 10 tons of food for the elephants.



Figure 7: Trucks block a road to prevent the elephants entering Yimen county, suburban Kunming, Yunnan, on June 16. [Photo by Wei Xiaohao/China Daily].

Local authorities vowed to give prompt early warnings and use emergency measures to the fullest (Fandi & Lin, 2021). The priority was to safeguard their journey, evacuate roads for them to pass safely and lure them away with food from more densely populated villages and town centres, thus ensuring the safety of local villagers too.

Based on the trail that the elephant runners recorded, local authorities drew up the “Elephant Accident and Prevention Emergency Plans”, deploying all possible resources to deal with the unusual emergency. Along with the task force, a scientific research and advisory team composed of 13 experts from related fields was created in response to the situation and to study this uncommon scenario.

The journey ended with the safe return of the elephants and with no harm caused to either the elephants or residents, as announced by the provincial headquarters in charge of protecting the herd.

According to experts, this migration is the farthest-known movement of elephants in China. Local officials, the task force and everyday people became familiar with these animals thanks to continuous social media monitoring. During their odyssey, millions of Chinese and others from around the globe tuned in to watch the adventurous journey on television and 24-hour live-streaming sites and even tracked their real-time movements on social platforms, turning the giant creatures into an online sensation.



Figure 8: Screenshots of Live Footage of the herd's movements from CGTN's broadcasts.

The world at large became familiar with this story. The changing size of the herd, what they were up to, every pit they fell into and every step of their journey. Yet, nobody, not even experts, is clear as to why the herd set out on this unprecedented trek. Some suggest that environmental degradation and diverse climate conditions may have spurred them; others believe they simply got lost. One possibility is that the herd's leader decided to leave the nature reserve or perhaps was influenced by other group members and then just got lost.

WHY

There was no clear answer. In the words of Dr. Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz, a principal investigator at the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden who specialises in elephants: “Don’t trust anyone who gives you a very clear response” (Wang, 2021).

The adventure attracted global attention and triggered heated discussions. While many expressed wonder and fascination, experts warned that this rare journey could indicate the inevitable and damaging consequences of human encroachment on the elephants’ natural habitat (Khurram & Hu, 2021). It raised concerns over the extension of human activities, the shrinking of species’ habitat, the urbanization of more wildlife areas, and the conversion of the so-called nature reserves into urban parks or agricultural areas.

Even a year later, there seems to be some debate on what might have triggered this journey, with conversations focusing on human-animal (im)balances. Most significant is the United Nations’ recent report published in August 2022, the *Interconnected Disaster Risks* report, which lists 10 disasters including these *wandering elephants* and others to explain how the root causes of seemingly isolated events are actually connected. In the case of the migrating herd, the report identified gaps in conservation and biodiversity practices. “Maximizing the number of animals without the right conservation approach triggered human-animal conflict and crisis inside the reserve”, said Jack O’Connor, lead author of the UN University’s report (United Nations University (UNU) – Institute for Environment and Human Security [UNU-EHS], 2022).

This migration galvanized a greater awareness of environmental problems in a nation that, in spite of great strides, remains among the world’s worst polluters.

This migration was a wake-up call. It decentralized humans, made elephants the protagonists to whom everything was adapted and it brought back and reminded us about traditional values concerned with a deep appreciation for nature. This migration highlighted our faults and through reporting we are able to see the core elements that made up this story and the outcomes it led to, or can still lead to.

4. Methodology and theoretical background

4.1. Research press coverage

The present dissertation will open with an ecolinguistic analysis of the reporting done by the English-written Chinese media outlets *CGTN*, *China Daily* and *Global Times*. To carry out the

analysis, we have looked through the online archives of all three sites by filtering the search with the following criteria:

- **Date range:** For each media, we have filtered the search to retrieve articles and online publications between January 1st, 2020, and September 30th, 2022. This has provided the first batch of material that has been used to analyse the relevant linguistic aspects of this paper. Any material found after September 30th, 2022, has been used to study any potential follow-up on the subject, relevant to the discussion part rather than linguistic analysis.
- **Keywords:** To retrieve only those articles relevant to this paper, we have used the following keywords to simplify the search: “elephants”, “migration”, “wandering elephants”, “Yunnan”, and “Yunnan herd”.

By applying the above filters, we have analysed a total of 235 news pieces, ranging from written chronicles, press releases and interviews to podcasts, infographics, photo reportages and news broadcasts. In the case of audio-visual material, we have transcribed the relevant expressions into written text. Every single article that mentioned or included any of the above keywords was carefully and individually reviewed by following several criteria from the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach that will be contextualised further in this paper. A detailed overview of the articles and their findings can be found in the Annex.

4.1. Linguistic theories: Frame Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis

This paper presents itself as an exercise of ecolinguistics and relies on two linguistic theories to examine the language used throughout this story and its ties with the ecology surrounding it. These are the Frame Theory and the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach.

The concepts of *frame*, *framing* and even *reframing* derive from several academic disciplines including sociology (Goffman, 1974); linguistics (Tannen, 1993); artificial intelligence (Minsky, 1988); and cognitive science (Lakoff, 2004). The **frame analysis** of sociologist Erving Goffman is particularly interesting for this paper because it concerns how people understand situations and activities. Goffman developed this notion in his book *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience* (1974) and ever since it has been used in communication studies, news, politics, and social movements among other applications.

In the field of journalism, the concept of 'framing' has been described as "the process by which a communication source, such as a news organisation, defines and constructs a political issue or public controversy" (Nelsen, Oxley, & Clawson, 1997). It is related to the concept of agenda-setting – a phenomenon defined as the way in which media attempts to influence viewers and establish a hierarchy of news prevalence (Dearing & Rogers, 1988). The definition provided by Gaye Tuchman (1978) is quite eye-opening:

News is a window on the world, and through its frame, Americans [public at large] learn of themselves and others, of their institutions, leaders, and lifestyles, and those of other nations and other peoples. The news aims to tell us what we want to know, need to know, and should know. But, like any frame that delineates a world, a news frame may be problematic. The view through a window depends upon whether the window is large or small, has many panes or few, whether the glass is opaque or clear, and whether the window faces a street or a backyard.

Framing influences how people interpret or process information and this can also influence how an agenda is set. However, frame analysis goes beyond mere agenda-setting by examining the issues implicit rather than the topics themselves (Goffman, 1974).

In linguistics and communication, framing is the process that entails a conscious and/or unconscious selection process of reality. Let's take the example of photography. When you take a picture of something you consciously choose to have a given image within a frame and choose to leave something out. In the process of choosing, you might not realise that what you leave out influences the perception of what is left in. The same thing happens with text.

This paper operates on the basis that frames influence interpretations of reality and follows the critical perspective that sees frames as mechanisms of representation of certain aspects of a perceived reality (Delon, 2018). Nonetheless, framing is just one piece of the puzzle of discourse analysis and just one side of the pragmatic background. There is no undertaking of framing without reference to Critical Discourse Analysis.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) studies are geared toward uncovering, revealing or disclosing what is implicit, hidden or otherwise not immediately obvious about discursively enacted dominance or its underlying ideologies (Van Dijk, 1993). CDA is a critical approach, position, or stance of studying text and talk, and can be employed in multiple ways. It provides techniques for analysing the linguistic features that build facticity around an event and can help

identify the gaps. But beyond analysing language itself, CDA can also be employed to look at how language is used to tell the story about the world.

Such an approach is one of the bases upon which the emerging paradigm of linguistic research known as ecolinguistics emerges, a new subfield of language scholarship that takes into account the physical and socio-ecological context in which language operates, and in turn, how language and discourse affect the environment and ecology.

4.2. Frame and CDA in Ecolinguistics

Ecolinguistics has been on the rise since the 1990s and is increasingly gaining significance. With the systemic changes and the climate crisis affecting the environment, improving the relationship humans have with their surroundings is essential and this also entails how we talk about it, especially if we consider that language has played a significant role in the destructive attitude towards the planet.

The notion that language can influence our take on ecology and reconceptualise, rebrand, rethink how we view our presence and our relationship with it was something already brought forward by British linguist Michael Halliday in 1990. During his speech *New ways of Meaning: the challenge to applied linguistics* (1990), Halliday talked about economic growth and how "countless texts repeated daily all around the world contained a simple message: growth is good. Many is better than few, more is better than less, big is better than small, grow is better than shrink", which leads to environmentally destructive consequences.

This speech is often credited as a work that provided the stimulus for linguists to consider the ecological context and consequences of language. Among other things, the challenge that Halliday put forward was to make linguistics relevant to overarching contemporary issues, particularly the widespread destruction of ecosystems.

Today and as defined by the International Ecolinguistics Association, ecolinguistics is concerned with "exploring the role of language in the life-sustaining interactions of humans, other species and the physical environment" (n.d.). This subfield of linguistic research attempts to make a practical difference in the world by resisting destructive stories and contributing to the search for beneficial new stories to live by (Stibbe, 2021).

These so-called "destructive stories" relate, according to ecolinguists, to consumerism, unlimited economic growth, advertising, intensive farming, and those which represent nature as a machine or a resource; whereas "**new stories to live by**" can take the shape of nature

writing, poetry, environmental writing and traditional forms of language around the world that use "positive discourse analysis" (Stibbe, 2018) – a new branch of CDA aimed at “studying the subversion of power and developing understandings which can energize social change” (Hughes, 2018).

Therefore, the first aim of ecolinguistics is to develop linguistic theories which see humans not only as part of society but also as part of the larger ecosystems that life depends on. The story of the 15 elephants might be a story of just a herd migrating through a country but it can also be a story of human-animal coexistence and new forms of harmony.

The second aim is to show how **linguistics can be used to address key ecological issues**, from climate change and biodiversity loss to environmental justice (International Ecolinguistics Association [IEA], n.d.). Placing and featuring the herd in the news is a first step in heightening environmental concern and biodiversity care. What needs to follow is the right framing of the story and the identification of what is said but also of what is left unsaid or unresolved, and the potential it holds to define (new) future actions and ways of understanding. Addressing these aspects can make the migrating elephants a potential *story to live by*.

The reason why we have brought forward framing analysis, CDA and ecolinguistics is because they are all interlinked. On the one hand, framing and CDA are of particular importance to ecolinguistics since the concept of framing is frequently used by organisations and individuals who are working towards social change. On the other, the ecological analysis of language draws on a wide range of linguistic tools including, but not only, critical discourse analysis and framing theory, to reveal underlying worldviews or the 'stories we live by'.

How to determine whether *The Elephants in the Room* is a *story to live by* or one we should live by, will depend on two things: one, how it has been portrayed and framed; and two, what actions and reactions it leads to.

Therefore, we will have a look at the reporting of English-written Chinese media on the migration of the 15 elephants by paying attention to selected categories of CDA to delimit the frame and its ecolinguistic characteristic. These will serve as the model of analysis in this study.

4.3. Linguistic categories for media analysis

The first aspect is concerned with **identity**, which is relevant for this paper because it links the level of the individual with the social and thus allows us to capture the processes by which individuals affiliate with or distance themselves from particular communities (or other

individuals), what kind of information they aim to convey about themselves and how this information, in turn, resonates with the idea others hold about them (Zotzmann & O'Regan, 2016). As Italian Professor and linguist Anna de Fina defined it: “identity is about conveying to one another what kind of people we are; which geographical, ethnic, social communities we belong to; where we stand in relation to ethical and moral questions; or where our loyalties are in political terms”.

The second aspect is concerned with **topicalization**. Topics stand for the most important information of a discourse that tells what a discourse is about. They abstractly characterise the meaning of a whole discourse or a larger fragment of discourse (Van Dijk, 1998). In stories, readers can notice that certain pieces of information appear as grammatical subjects of the sentence and are thereby topicalized (which is a type of foregrounding at the sentence level). Topicalization is thus a form of sentence-level foregrounding: by choosing what to put in the topic position, writers create a perspective that influences the reader's perception (Al-Duleimi & Al-Ebadi, 2016). Topicalization is an important feature in this reporting because it provides more clarity on which topics are foregrounded versus those that are left in the background.

In addition, topicalization is closely linked with the so-called agent-patient relations typical of **transitivity**, the third CDA aspect to consider. In linguistic analyses, the concept of transitivity is associated with the notion of agency and consists in the foregrounding of the patient and the de-topicalization of the agent. It answers the question, “Who is doing what to whom?”. Many texts will describe things so that certain persons are consistently depicted as initiating actions (and thus exerting power) while others are depicted as being (often passive) recipients of those actions. In most cases, the semantic agent (or actor) in a sentence is depicted as having more power than the patient. Investigation of these choices is referred to as transitivity analysis, and this has become a central aspect of critical approaches to discourse analysis because these types of linguistic choices reveal the attitude and ideology of the language user. Understanding whether someone is depicted as an agent and, if so, who; and gaining clarity on who is doing what to whom delimits the frame of a story.

The fifth CDA element consists in looking at the **vagueness** of discourse, and it purposely follows the first linguistic elements because it aims to fill the gaps that these uncovered.

The notion of vagueness is much discussed in the fields of philosophy, logic and semantics (Keefe, 2000; Shapiro, 2008; Sorensen, 2018). From a linguistic perspective, it has been recognised that vagueness is an essential feature of both ordinary language and specialised

discourse. People may not necessarily and not always be aware of vagueness in language use, while in other cases they choose deliberately to be vague (Bhatia & Engberg, 2005).

In 1923, intellectual Bertrand Russell proposed a seminal contribution in which he emphasised a point that is central to our present reflection. Russell underlined how vagueness is an inherent characteristic of any system of representation of the world, be it language, photography or painting (1923). Moreover, vagueness does not characterise the things of the world but the system that aims to represent it. In the case of language, vagueness occurs whenever there are borderline cases, that is, when there are statements that cannot be said to be either true or false (Buhler, 2021). For example, it seemed to be impossible to precisely determine the cause of the elephants' migration yet it is in the vagueness that might reside the most important aspect of our story.

Ultimately, with the discursive element of vagueness, we look at modality (consisting of the use of modal verbs such as should, would, could, can, may, must and shall that express possibility or necessity) and omission (another form of backgrounding and textual silence by leaving certain aspects out, including also, for example, the omission of agents of power which is most often achieved with nominalization, converting a verb into a noun, and the use of passive verbs). Vagueness refers to expressions that are either unclear because they do not give enough information or because they do not say exactly what they mean.

In addition to these elements, it is also relevant to observe two *ad hoc* linguistic features. First, the notion of **temporality** by looking at markers such as after, before or while that express a temporal relation (Mann & Thompson, 1987), allows us to situate the event with its historical context, its sequence and potential linkage with other events. Second, in the more in-depth articles, it will be significant to observe the **connotation** of what is being reported and whether it expresses positive or negative attitudes.

The beforementioned discursive methods and theories allow us to determine whether the migration of the 15 elephants is a 'story we live by', a story with the potential to shape lives and the society we live in, and an example of environmental communication.

5. PART I – NARRATIVE

"It's a wildlife journey that has captivated the globe."

TIME MAGAZINE – Charlie Campbell (Shanghai). July 14, 2021

In its traditional sense, the word 'story' refers to a narrative with a clear beginning, middle and end, and takes place over time. When readers engage with a story in such a traditional way they can recognise it as such by its structure and context, and hence treat it as just one possible perspective or interpretation of the world around us. Yet, it is also the case that often we are unaware that our stories are stories, consequently experiencing them as the world and not just one interpretation of it (Loy, 2010).

The migration of the 15 elephants is a story. Through the voice of reporters, it was conveyed as an account of a connected series of events and presented as a report in a newspaper or on a news broadcast about something that had happened. It began somewhere and at a given moment, evolved over time, until finding its tangible ending, again, in some place and in a concrete timeframe.



Figure 9: Aerial photo taken on June 7 shows the wild Asian elephant herd in Xiyang Yi autonomous town of Jinning district of Kunming, Yunnan province. [Photo provided by Yunnan Provincial Forest Fire Brigade].

The story of the elephants is a written, spoken and visual account of their trek that has so far only been partially interpreted. On the one hand and inevitably, it is an interpretation from an anthropocentric perspective presented through a human voice. On the other, the story the world has read only touches the surface of other stories hidden within: a story about the changing environment, a story about multispecies cooperation, a story about new ways of coexistence, a story about redemption, a story about chaos.

Finding out and emphasising those inner stories is the exercise of reading between the lines which provides information that is equally, if not more important than what is being said and accounted for out loud. For instance, the event in China was picked up and conveyed from different angles, providing multiple versions of the same tale. “Epic trek”, “wandering elephants” and “a real rating-hit event” but also “savage elephants”, “drunken herd” and “destructive journey”. The two-sided approach to the same fact has significant consequences, especially if we consider that language, culture, human cognition, stories, and texts play a role in human ecology to the extent that they influence human behaviour, and hence the ways that humans interact with each other and the larger natural world (Stibbe, 2021). In addition, identifying and embracing a story that has the potential to change course is an opportunity for change.

In a very interesting essay published by the *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, they argue how there is a need to focus on promoting hope-based messages to make people believe a better world is possible. The author talks about Narrative Change which is a field that has emerged over the past few years, especially after non-profits and foundations focusing on supporting human rights saw that many of their hard-won policy victories were being reversed, or were just never implemented in practice. As a response, an entire ecosystem of organisations has developed based on the insight that in order to achieve lasting, systemic change, it is not enough just to change a few policies. We need to shift the underlying system of stories that help people make sense of the world (Davidson, 2022).

The way in which a story is presented, or more accurately ‘framed’, changes the outcomes and influences perceptions. Framing is inevitable and some might not even realise they are using frames. Acknowledging the frames we build around a story is essential to better understand how a given reality is conveyed.

To assess the frame of the *wandering elephants’* coverage and storytelling, we first go through the media analysis and review the results stemming from these.

5.1. Media analysis

The three media outlets that were analysed are *Global Times*, *CGTN* and *China Daily*, paying attention to the different CDA aspects as well as noting down interesting reflections brought forward. The analysis did not consider the articles published by the news agency *Xinhua* because the website did allow to retrieve content so far back. Moreover, it was not a priority

to dwell too much on the quantitative sum as much as on the qualitative analysis. In addition, the other three media outlets already picked up content produced by *Xinhua*, often pushing online the same information. Therefore, it seemed unnecessary to repeat the exercise as that would mean reading the same articles more than once.

The media analysis specifically required looking through the online archive of all three media outlets to collect all the reporting done on the subject in all its different formats. Looking through all their articles allowed for a bird's-eye view of the story because it did not only provide factual information but also the side-line conversations and interpretations as well as trends and features that rose while the herd was on the move.

Below we will list these aspects and the interesting findings, starting with the media outlet that had the highest coverage.

5.1.1. CGTN

Among the three media outlets analysed, *CGTN* was the one with the most coverage, counting a total of 105 pieces in their online archive between March 19th, 2020, and August 12th, 2022. From beginning to end, the news channel explored many diverse formats: standard TV broadcasting with on-site reporting (which was thoroughly emphasized as a show of “avid enthusiasm” on the elephants), written updates both digital and printed, informal podcasts and video episodes, social media clips, digital infographic representations and expert conversations. Similar to the other media outlets, the coverage increased as of May 2021, the moment the elephants’ presence increased in human-populated areas like Eshan and Yuxi city, although it was not as much about the migration *per se* but more about the topics surrounding it: easing human-animal coexistence, new technologies to monitor elephants, and national conservation efforts. Then, when the herd was returning home, the coverage increased again, capturing how it was a country’s success, a story lived, followed and celebrated by everyone.

What made a difference was their on-site reporter Ma Ke, who followed the herd throughout its entire journey and reported on the whereabouts of the herd, the wellbeing of the animals and the responses of local authorities. Live footage and on-the-ground reporting allowed the audience to follow and almost feel part of this journey. In addition to Ma Ke, another journalist was featured largely and also did extensive reporting, Yang Jinghao.

Unlike *Global Times* and *China Daily* which mostly report in the written form, *CGTN* benefited from being a TV broadcaster because this visual storytelling is what triggered the

most. The videos touched the heart while the texts captured the mind. Their live footage was also a tool to reveal the *truth* of this journey, showing the damage the herd was causing and the danger they could pose, not only to humans but also to themselves. It was important to avoid romanticizing the story. Moreover, the TV footage also made it possible for international viewers to see and learn more from an event that they are very unfamiliar with, generating some sort of empathy and knowledge sharing (in some cases they compared to what other foreign communities experience, like the presence of coyotes in North American neighbourhoods).

This story was clearly framed as *the* story, an exceptional story that deserved and required attention. The most significant episode which will be further paid attention to in this paper is the broadcasting of June 9th, 2021, in the network's segment *Headline Buster*. During this Livestream, reporter and senior host of *CGTN* Liu Xin dedicated a 45-minute show to address this event together with other expert voices. Besides answering the usual questions on this migration (cause, route, action, etc), this show underlined how the herd's migration was a story covered almost the same globally and that despite some nuances and inaccuracies, the differences were not political. This was a "uniting kind of story because it did not have the political nor nationalistic sensitivities that tend to divide us", said guest Professor Rick Dunham from Tsinghua University during the broadcast. Instead of accusatory pieces from international media, this event was covered more "fairly" without jumping to conclusions, maybe because it was a "universal story", "a story hard to twist" as pointed out by Liu Xin.

Also, they used this occasion to respond to misreporting from international media outlets, foreign lecturing and wrong assumptions (theories promoted as conclusions that were not accurate). This show and the event overall were a chance to get the record straight about China's real efforts in conservation and biodiversity efforts. It was a beautiful story with important, serious connotations that deserved a closer look.

Identity

At the beginning, these elephants did not have any particular identification. They were generally referred to as "Wild Asian Elephants" (May 12, 2020), an objective definition of the animal in question as it describes the species, yet the adjective "wild" delimits the observer's and reader's relationship with the subject. These animals are wild as they are not part of a

humanised structure. Then contrarily, as of May 31st, 2021, these *wild* elephants became owned subjected and relabelled to:

“Yunnan’s Migrating Elephants”
CGTN, Ma Ke | May 31, 2021

“China’s famous herd”
CGTN | June 2, 2021

“China’s wandering elephants”
CGTN, Simon Ormiston | June 9, 2021

“China’s beloved elephants”
CGTN, Katherine Berjikian | June 18, 2021

“China’s migrating elephants”
CGTN, Xinhua News Agency | June 28, 2021

With the gain of fame and the spread of the journey, the fact that these elephants belonged to the nation was increasingly emphasised. During the broadcast of June 9th, 2021, it was made sure to underline that these elephants were Chinese and that this was a Chinese story with “serious connotations”.

Topicalization

Although headlines topicalized the elephants, it soon switches to foregrounding the humans involved. Most articles opened with headlines and leads that foregrounded the herd at a sentence level but in the reporting, in the overall text, the elephants disappeared in the background and the focus switched to the human voices involved. It is a real human story with local perceptions, expert guidance, authority reassurance, and international (human) concern. China's protection efforts are what matters as well as the outcomes that ought to follow.

“China's efforts to protect wild elephants lead to rising numbers. (...) The conflict between human and nature has been a challenge globally and China's efforts deserve applause.”

CGTN | June 4, 2021

Transitivity

Two trends that characterise CGTN's coverage, just like they do with the other two media outlets. Firstly, there is a shift in agency and leading action. At the beginning of the migration, the elephants were portrayed as individuals determining their own patterns:

"For wild Asian elephants roaming between rainforests and croplands, life is simple. They eat, play and sleep every day. (...) Having lived side by side with farmers in Yunnan for many years, smart wild Asian elephants know the right time to find tasty food like sugarcane in croplands near the rainforest. After the harvest, they would visit the croplands less and return to the rainforest for nourishment"

CGTN, Zhao Ying | May 12, 2020

Furthermore, the herd is represented as a subject that has agency, consciously choosing a better place to live and deciding to leave. Yet, their actions and course were soon taken over by humans who started to delimit the course these elephants should take:

"Authorities guide migrating elephants toward habitat (...) local authorities have mobilized resources to guide them southwest, back toward Yuxi City"

CGTN, Ma Ke | June 6, 2021

Local authorities delimited their trek in a bid to prevent harm to both the animals and humans. Also, the actions between the two parties were quite different: while elephants were causing damage and havoc, humans were cleaning it up, re-establishing order and peace. There is even a tendency to characterise the trek as "care-free" by using verbs like "ramble" and "wander", implying a careless attitude.

Secondly, the agent-patient relationship evolved until reaching a balanced relationship between the two. Even if the elephant story became a human story told and narrated by humans, there was a sense of bonding. The story brought the relationship between human-animal closer and ignited debates, in-depth conversations and prompted local as well as global reactions:

"Never has nature been so close to us, and moving to. Elephants have united people around the world, raising important tasks on how can we coexist peacefully"

CGTN, Liu Xin | June 9, 2021

As one headline suggested on June 4th, 2021, this story has had the potential to improve and strengthen the connection and relationship between humans and other-than-human animals: “A meaningful dialogue between humans and nature”.

Vagueness

The mystery element is the clickbait of the story with headlines such as “The mystery of China’s wandering elephants” (June 6, 2021), and sentences such as “leaves experts puzzled” (June 3, 2021) and “no one knows why” (May 31, 2021). With these, the story gained uniqueness and made it the centre of attention with everyone looking at it:

“However, what makes these endangered animals leave their habitat and march north is still a mystery. (...). In fact, this is the first time in history this has happened, so everyone is thinking about the reasons. It remains to be further observed and studied”

CGTN | May 31, 2021

The use of words and expressions like “unusual” (June 8, 2021), “unknown” (June 8, 2021), “experts guess” (May 31, 2021) and “the suggestion is” (June 1, 2021) indicate a level of vagueness that characterised the event throughout. This is complemented by vague explanations of unclear aspects of the story. For example, not mentioning the reason behind the increase of animals’ presence in a village or by not clarifying why the herd keep pushing north after animal experts said it is uncommon and the fact that there is no food up north. This vagueness is also spotted by the use of modal verbs of possibility such as may be.

We also identified several cases of omission mainly about the impossibility to pinpoint the trigger, which can be seen with the omission of the agent of power when it comes to identifying the root of the cause, as seen on October 30, 2021, when an article mentioned how the reduction of their habitat could be a trigger yet it omitted to say who led this action and hence prompted this event:

“Between 2011 and 2015, about 48,000 incidents were reported of elephants ravaging cropland and injuring people. This is not surprising as the animals' living space, which once covered over half the country, has been squeezed to a small southwest corner where about 300 still roam the rainforest.”

CGTN | October 30, 2020

In addition to why the herd left, there are other questions brought forward equally vaguely addressed:

“We may never find out why they have left their habitat and where they want to go, but at least we can learn to live harmoniously with elephants and other wild animals as well”

CGTN, Ma Ke | May 31, 2021

Moreover, in the beforementioned episode of June 9th, 2021, what seems to really matter is how international media covered the efforts of local authorities, why this event captivated so many people and what it says about the important relationship between humans and wildlife. All of this points to a very important, difficult task, this need to find a better way of living, of co-existing, yet it does not indicate how this coexistence would actually unfold.

Temporality

Throughout the entire journey, there was a continuous reminder of where the herd came from and a fearful expectation of where they would go next. Extensive work was done to continuously update the readers on the herd’s whereabouts.

Besides the present, this event was connected with both the past and the future. Firstly, CGTN presented the event as a consequence of a long-lasting pattern, spread through time like “continuous dry weather” (April 25, 2020) or the combination of multiple factors:

“Whatever the real reasons are, many scientists, including Guo, are confident that human activities and climate change have had an impact on such animal behaviour, putting land and resources under increasing strain and causing a rise in human-elephant conflict in the last 10 years.”

CGTN, Yang Zhao, Yang Xiao | June 12, 2021

It was also compared to past migrations and, in contrast to these, considered unique due to the lack of previous examples, leading to headlines emphasising this uniqueness like “The longest elephant journey in China's history” (June 7, 2021), and sentence-level statements like “It is the longest-ever trek made by a herd of elephants in China” (June 8, 2021). Moreover, on one occasion there was also a connection with the traditional past. On June 18th, 2021, expert Iain Douglas-Hamilton, Senior Scientist from *Save the Elephant*, explained that if we were to look back in time, this migration would not be considered so far-fetched but rather quite connected with past patterns:

“Quite unprecedented event but it depends on how far back you look in history. (...) The elephants are heading back in the direction where they use to live 1500 years ago”

CGTN, Katherine Berjikian | June 18, 2021

In terms of the future, the mystery aspect of the migration is also a reason for continuity and with the possibility for longer-lasting consequences that ought to be considered and paid attention to:

“Their food habit is showing initial changes from natural plants to crops, which could make the behaviour of trespassing human territory a new habit. This is a long-term concern of forestry experts and authorities.”

CGTN, Ma Ke | June 1, 2021

“The story shall be kept alive for the sake of awakening decision-makers from both public and private sectors for more ambitious and immediate actions of conservation.”

CGTN, Wu Changhua | August 10, 2021

Connotation

In terms of connotation, there is a shifting balance between a negative interpretation (with the need to mitigate tension and respond to damages) and positive outcomes (admiration for the results). The alarming tone is most prominent at the beginning, with articles anticipating the chaos the herd’s arrival might cause in populated areas but this is rapidly replaced by a more positive connotation with references to celebration and victory. The emphasis on international coverage and good local efforts brighten the rather initial darker tone. In addition, the promising outcomes also contribute to this with mentions such as “A beautiful story with important, serious connotations” (June 9, 2021) and the conviction that “We can call this a decisive victory” (August 10, 2021).

5.1.2. China Daily

The outlet *China Daily* largely covered the elephants’ migration with 89 articles between April 3rd, 2020, and September 11th, 2021. The media published some of *Xinhua*’s releases (with 20 articles to be exact) but the reporting in-house was more significant, which was done from different angles and locations. The event was covered by multiple reporters on the ground located across the country. The journalist Li Yingqing covered the event most prominently, from Kunming, with a total of 19 articles published in her name, some of which she did in

collaboration with other reporters among whom stand out Yang Wanli who covered the event from Beijing. Another notable coverage was done by Hou Liqiang who moved across the province along with the herd, going from Kunming to Yuxi city and Pu'er. In addition to other local coverage, *China Daily* also included articles from reporters based in the United Kingdom, publishing three pieces from London (one from Angus McNeice and two by Bo Leung), and opinion pieces written by experts such as Wei Wei, Head of Rare Animals and Plants Institute from China West Normal University, and Xueli Wu from the Guangdong University of Foreign Studies.

The first article to focus on the herd dates back to April 3rd, 2020, but the media was already paying attention to this region before, specifically looking at the need to strengthen the protection of wild Asian elephants in Yunnan by expanding its habitat. For instance, at the beginning of 2020, they published an article that mentioned how “two-thirds of the wild elephants were living outside the reserves because the increasing forest canopy density had resulted in food shortage” (January 22, 2020), which is one of the causes later attributed to the herd’s migration. It also talked about the need to develop and have more expertise “to reduce contact and conflict between elephants and locals”, again also something later considered in the elephants’ coverage. In a way, this article acted as a premonition of what would unfold in the coming months.

In terms of timeline, after the first publication in April, only a couple of articles followed until August 2020, some even ad hoc to the migration concretely. It was not until April 2021, a year later, that the media picked up on this event and as of May 28th, 2021, it started covering it more extensively with more coverage every week, most likely due to the arrival of the herd in more densely populated areas like Eshan county, Yuxi City and Kunming (in some cases there were even five articles per day and with some being included in the printed version). The coverage did not only increase in quantity but also in quality.

More and more articles expanded on the seriousness of the event, looking into issues of *harmonious coexistence* and the need to develop an *ecological civilisation*. Then, as of June 2021, the number of articles decreased as well as their quality flattened – they generally consisted of updates on their whereabouts and were mainly releases by the news agency *Xinhua*. Once the herd returned to their natural habitat, *China Daily* picked it up again, focusing more on the significance “behind the scenes”: the increase in public awareness, the

improvement in environmental protection and biodiversity efforts, the success of the local response, and the need for an *ecological civilisation*.

China Daily also shared a lot of multimedia content to illustrate the phenomenon, with simple clips of the elephants, video interviews with experts or reporters on-site, podcast episodes, photography and drone footage. As argued in an article, the great concern about elephants showed that “people tend to be motivated more by lively reports and photos of animals, as opposed to vague or more formal concepts like degradation and deforestation” (August 30, 2021). The images and clips might have functioned as clickbait but it was a necessary step to ensure an important read and a deeper look into the story.

Identity

In the beginning, *China Daily* was not as vocal in taking ownership of this herd as it generally referred to them by their technical name. Eventually, it also personalised the herd by labelling them “China’s migrating herd” (June 9, 2021). This happened after it was known that the elephant herd had “caught global attention” (June 9, 2021). We can observe this by looking at headlines released the following days:

“China’s wandering elephants become ‘International Stars’

China Daily | June 11, 2021

“China’s famous herd of wandering elephants”

China Daily | June 15, 2021

Topicalization

There were two opposite representations of this event, quite different from beginning to end. When the migration started in the spring of 2020, *China Daily* tended to present the elephants more as “protagonists of disaster”. There was quite a catastrophic portrayal of the event by foregrounding and labelling the herd as “wreaking havoc” (April 3, 2020), pointing out the damage they were causing. This completely changed a year later. As of April 2021, damage was replaced by success. Unlike a year before when articles opened with headlines focusing on chaos and damage, now it was about:

“Achievements seen in wildlife protections”

Yang Wanli, Xinhua News Agency | April 22, 2021

These achievements specifically and implicitly imply human success, ironically over a situation that seemed to have been caused by humans in the first place. Moreover, even if the elephants were topicalized, their story became the “hook” to elaborate on the country’s positive efforts in wildlife conservation.

As of this point, the focus lay on either the monitoring team of the Yunnan Provincial Forest Fire Brigade or the international attention over this event. It was equally significant to underline the “difficult but important task” (June 10, 2021) of the elephant trackers as well as the global attention that was given to the celebrated local response rather than the elephants per se.

Transitivity

As seen with the topicalization, the focus shifted from the elephants and their unexpected presence to the monitoring team and their coordinated response. Initially, the herd was conveyed more as the character in the story causing the damage, whereas humans were the ones cleaning it up, putting into question who was the real protagonist of this story.

The Forest Fire Brigade led the action and the herd was passively receiving those actions: they were “escorted”, “tracked” and “steered” (June 10, 2021) by the monitoring group. In some cases, it went as far as to argue that the reason for the herd’s fame was thanks to humans:

“The most important reason the event landed in the spotlight was the joint efforts of the government and residents to ensure the safety of both animals and humans”

China Daily, Xueli Wu | August 30, 2021

Because the monitoring group is often topicalized, the most significant actions are the ones led by them rather than the actions of the elephants themselves:

“Monitors constantly track elephants, warn villagers. Monitors in Yunnan province have managed to closely follow a herd of wild Asian elephants that has trekked far away from its traditional habitat. They [task force] work around the clock, alerting communities that the animals are approaching.”

China Daily, Hou Liqiang | June 16, 2021

“Wherever the elephants have arrived, local governments have adopted various measures to evacuate villagers so as to make way for them, and where possible food has been provided for them so they detour around villages in order to protect the property and ensure the safety of villagers. Even when the elephants have intruded into villages and damaged properties, the

villagers have done nothing to hurt the huge animals, as they know they are under A-level state protection.”

China Daily | June 21, 2021

In contrast to the apparent lack of agency of the herd, there is one particular article that suggests otherwise. On June 21st, 2021, a consulted expert voice said that these elephants were not migrating but rather dispersing:

“Something that is important to understand is that these elephants are not migrating, which I hear in the media a lot. They are dispersing —they are moving out of their native home range into unknown territories.”

China Daily, Angus Mcneice (London) | June 21, 2021

This concept (to *disperse*) acts as a trigger word for the category of transitivity because it means a conscious choice of action, a decision to actively leave and to continue moving somewhere else; very different from the careless and lost attitude normally used to describe the animals’ behaviour. The same quote continued by emphasising that “elephants are very intelligent animals; they do not follow instinct as much as many other animals. They are much more decision-makers”. This observation was also included in an article from *CGTN*, using the same source, but also left unnoticed.

Overall, there was a clear agent-patient relationship that changed according to the angle you looked at it. Closely, it is clear that humans led the actions and were featured as the heroes in the story, but from afar, from the bigger picture, the elephants are the ones to trigger the story, indirectly telling it. There seems to be a handing over of responsibility. From “Asian elephant family highlights conservation message” (August 12, 2021) to “China to further promote protection of Asian elephants” (August 13, 2021). As indicated in multiple articles, the “Wild Asian Elephant” is the one “bringing the world together” (June 25, 2021) and it is the herd “sending key environmental message” (Xueli Wu, 2021).

The elephants began this story and raised awareness but now it is up to China to continue it, for “China to further promote environmental conservation” (August 13, 2021).

Vagueness

“Unlikely” (June 14, 2021), “unknown” (August 30, 2021), “mysterious” and “baffled scientists” (June 25, 2021) opened many articles throughout the 17-month journey. The element of

uncertainty was repeated throughout and it was clearly emphasised that it was not only a local concern but a “global mystery” (June 9, 2021) that required further research and more studies to understand what triggered this move. The vagueness on this matter can be most often perceived by the use of modal verbs like could be and may be, expressing a degree of uncertainty:

“The exact reason is still unclear. (...) But it could be that, along with conservation efforts, the population of Asian elephants in the wild has grown and in a bid to find more territory and resources, elephants could be leaving (nature reserves).”

China Daily, Yang Han | June 11, 2021

“The famous herd of wandering elephants could be exhibiting a trend of returning south after their northward trek of some 500 km in Southwest China's Yunnan province.”

China Daily | June 20, 2021

“Wandering elephants unlikely to return home soon, experts say. Preliminary monitoring suggests the herd may be attempting to return to Xishuangbanna, but determining its likely route will need further research.”

China Daily, Hou Liqiang | June 22, 2021

Rather than trying to identify the cause, which is a question that is vaguely answered as it was still unknown at the time, it is more relevant to pay attention to two topics that were sometimes indirectly addressed although generally omitted.

On the one hand, in the beginning, the media pointed out that for years they have studied elephants and noticed how “about two-thirds of them are now living outside reserves because the increasing forest canopy density has resulted in food shortages” (May 31, 2021). This brings us to wonder whether it was completely unpredictable that something like this would happen. Did it require such an “out-of-the-box” event for us to pay attention to this so extensively?

On the other, the uncertainty should not only concern the cause but rather the underlying problems and the challenges to come. As stated in one article:

“The challenge for authorities is working out what needs to be done next. This includes continuing to provide safe passage for the herd, guiding them toward the closest available safe haven and possibly relocating the entire herd back to their Xishuangbanna habitat. Each of these comes with its own risk, uncertainty, cost and challenges which need to be evaluated further”

China Daily, Yang Han | June 11, 2021

While the cause of this uncommon migratory phenomenon remained unknown, it could reflect some serious underlying environmental problems yet to be detected:

“Whether the herd left to seek a larger territory due to the rising elephant population or because of the declining quality of the original habitat, the trek should sound the alarm of a rising desperation among wild animals for a more ideal habitat and the expectation of more such events to come in the following years. Furthermore, the herd failed to find a better territory, sending the distressing message of the urgency to conserve the Earth's few remaining big ecosystems to sustain larger species of animals”

China Daily, Xueli Wu | August 30, 2021

The herd highlighted one aspect of the many pressing environmental issues our world faces. In response to wildlife migrations, humans could develop management systems but these would not suffice because it still fails to address the core problem.

In addition, and oddly enough, the entire event was not connected with the coronavirus context. There is little reference to the pandemic and how the reduced human presence might have been a contributing factor. Just one article mentioned it:

“When many parts of the world went into lockdown to help control the spread of the novel coronavirus, researchers found wildlife thrived in the wake of reduced human activity.”

China Daily, Bo Leung in London | June 23, 2021

Temporality

The choice of words and expressions like “keep wandering” (June 3, 2021), “continue to linger” (June 6, 2021), “continues to wander” and “continues to meander” (August 8, 2021) remind readers that this is an event spread through time, with yet no clear ending in sight. The main focus is on the herd’s whereabouts with occasional references to other timeframes.

Whereas the past is used to explain the cause, the future seems to be the place where all answers lie:

“Of course, elephants have been criss-crossing Yunnan quite frequently in the past several years and the residents there must know how to co-exist peacefully with them by now.”

China Daily, Wei Wei | June 24, 2021

“The Asian elephants' trek reflects environmental progress. This event not only puts in evidence the need to tackle it today but it raises another task of what we can do in the next decade.”

China Daily, Huang Wenbin | August 9, 2021

Most interestingly, there is even a reference to ancient past in an attempt to bridge this event with the country's history:

"In Kunming, there is a street named "Xiangyan" (elephant eye), where foreign diplomats from Southeast Asian countries broke their journeys to send elephants as gifts to rulers during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). However, if those wild giants do appear again in this street, they will pose a considerable problem."

China Daily, Yang Wanli and Li Yingqing | May 31, 2021

Nonetheless, this past is not really considered significant enough as it is only mentioned once, even though this connection could have bigger consequences in terms of ethology and understanding of the animal's behaviour.

Connotation

China Daily is the only media that really stresses several times the seriousness behind this event. On June 4th, 2021, an opinion piece by Wei Wei, Head of Rare Animals and Plants Institute from the China West Normal University, underlined the importance to counteract potentially misguided portrayal of this event by media and locations unfamiliar with these kinds of events. Although this is an exceptional case, elephant intrusion is not rare in China and it is important to underline the complexities and dangers that characterise these, hence articles with headlines such as "Wild animals are not for show" (June 4, 2021) or "There is nothing amusing about stray animals" (June 2, 2021). These aim to make clear that it is an important matter that needs to be taken seriously and not romanticized about.

5.1.3. Global Times

Global Times published a rough total of 41 articles covering the migration, the first article published on May 28th, 2021, and the last on September 20th, 2022. Most of the articles were releases taken from the national news agency *Xinhua*, especially at the beginning of the herd's trek (when the migration was not considered as significant or as different from other animal migrations) and little before the end (when there was not so much excitement anymore). The media outlet published around 18 articles from the local news agency *Xinhua*, wrote 11 articles in-house with no accredited author and over ten articles by different journalists. The most recurrent journalist covering this topic was reporter Cui Fandi, who not only followed the herd more closely but also provided some very interesting insights and reflections, going beyond

mere monitoring of the animals. In addition, the coverage of these elephants increased between June 11th and the beginning of July 2021, with more than one article published per day. This was due because the herd was more present in densely populated areas such as Yuxi city and the surrounding Kunming.

Like other media outlets, *Global Times* picked up on the uniqueness and fascination of the event yet also included some faults that went with the story: the alarming tone for the herd's arrival at human cities and the uncertainty of the cause with expert speculation as to what might be the truth.

What is significant is the continuous call to action that most articles finished with. Besides a contextual background to the event (where the herd is, who is involved, what are authorities doing, etc), articles from the *Global Times* also put an eye on future courses of action. They reflect on how the migration "has sparked discussions on the protection of wild animals in a comprehensive way, including the preservation of their habitat and maintenance of a plantation system and buffer zones" (June 7, 2021). They also point out how "ecological corridors for animals to migrate between habitats should also be maintained or restored", especially after witnessing this event" (June 7, 2021).

Identity

In most cases, *Global Times* addressed the herd from an objective stance by labelling them as a group of "wild elephants" (May 30, 2021), "stray elephants" (June 2, 2021), and "wandering wild elephants" (June 9, 2021). It was not until June 2021, that the media started to join the trend of identifying this group as a national pride by taking ownership of the elephants with headlines such as "China's migrating elephants" (June 9, 2021) and "China's famous herd" (June 15, 2021). In addition, not only were they portrayed as a national character but also, and especially, a *worldwide sensation*:

"Social media stars in China and around the world"

Global Times, Ji Yuqiao, Chen Xi and Li Yuche | June 15, 2021

Topicalization

Most articles opened with the elephants being the main topic. Headlines would feature "15 elephants on the move" (May 28, 2021), "Migrating herd" (June 9, 2021; June 11, 2021; June 12, 2021) and "Wandering elephants" (June 13, 2021; June 14, 2021). Once the story evolved

and as did the elephants' trek, the spotlight quickly changed by foregrounding the humans instead (i.e. local authorities, competent authority, task force). It was no longer about their trek specifically but what the authorities were doing about it: how many drones were they flying, what operations were they setting up, how they were guiding the herd, and what compensation they would give to affected farmers.

What started as an animal-led story turned out to be a human-response story: how we, humans, perceived it; how we dealt with it; how we felt about it. Also, these elephants would be presented with ideas of them being lost, misplaced and not where they belong. Almost as if they were intruders and trespassing.

"Kunming well prepared as 15 wild elephants intrude after 500km journey"

Global Times, Cui Fandi and Wan Lin | June 3, 2021

Transitivity

It is undeniable that this story started only because the herd actively went on the move but the rest of this journey was delimited, told, marked by human intervention. Seeing it from the agent-patient relationship, humans are depicted as the ones initiating actions (and thus exerting power), while the elephants are generally depicted as being (often passive) recipients of those actions, which in this case was necessary to ensure the protection of all those involved, both human and animal.

Local officials are recurrently presented as the protagonists of this story to which the elephants respond with almost no agency – they were persuaded and guided to return home.

"Local authorities have vowed to make every effort to persuade the animals to return home. (...) Successfully luring them into the deep forest and away from the city where they were previously headed."

Global Times | June 2, 2021

Humans took over the elephants' story, up to the point that elephants seem to be portrayed as the means to an end: the puppet being *puppeteered* by humans as a way to showcase the country's positive response and actions.

"Chinese say we should thank the elephants for making the world finally see how adorable China is. (...) Their episodes have mirrored China's long-term relentless efforts to protect the environment and wild animals."

Global Times, Ai Jun | June 18, 2021

The seemingly passive attitude of the herd can also be perceived by the use of verbs such as “to linger” (June 8, 2021; June 14, 2021) and “to wander” (May 30, 2021; June 6, 2021; June 9, 2021), which mean continue to be in a place longer than necessary (longer than wanted by others) and to walk aimlessly (of being lost, misplaced).

Moreover, the elephants were presented as an aggregation of many (“The herd”), almost like one big entity that started the story with agency but ended up having their fate determined and narrated by humans. As seen in the previous category of identity, they were no longer themselves but appropriated by the nation, they were “China’s migrating herd” (June 9, 2021; June 11, 2021; June 12, 2021).

One last important characteristic is the particular use of the concept of exodus, a term that did not appear in any other media outlet.

“Local officials face quandary after wild elephants make 400km 'exodus' in Yunnan. (...) The expert said the recovery of the environment of the habitat is key to preventing any future elephant "exodus.”

Global Times, Cui Fandi | May 30, 2021

“The elephant "exodus” may continue if the ecological condition of the habitat is not thoroughly improved, Zhang noted.”

Global Times, Cui Fandi and Wan Li | June 3, 2021

On repeated occasions, *Global Times* used the word *exodus* to describe the migration. If we pay closer attention to this word, which implies a sort of protest, a mass movement of individuals responding to something, the elephants’ behaviour changes: from a lost herd lingering and wandering without a goal to almost a decisive herd leaving in response to a changed situation.

Vagueness

Once again, vagueness relates to the uncertainty of it all and especially the reason behind the migration, which can be seen by the use of modal verbs on several occasions:

“The shrinking of rainforests in the elephants' home in Xishuangbanna may be a reason that led to the migration.”

Global Times, Huang Lanlan | May 28, 2021

“As for why the herd made its long journey, local officials said it may be related to the alteration in the wild elephants' diet”

Global Times, Cui Fandi and Wan Li | June 3, 2021

The level of uncertainty goes beyond the cause itself as it also appeals to the overall evolution of the event. Headlines such as “Wandering elephant herd ‘unlikely to go home’” (June 14, 2021) describe the level of unpredictability on whenever the herd would go home and, if so, how and when. This sensation remained until the end and even turned out to be the hook to continue reading and following the story:

“The reason they left their leafy habitat, where lush forests seem to touch the sky, remains an enigma.”

Xinhua News Agency | June 20, 2021

In addition to the unresolved cause, it is equally important to point out what is left unsaid yet hinted to. This concerns the irony of what the cause is and how its portrayal and interpretation changed. As stated an article:

“Previously, there was speculation that wild elephants were leaving their habitat because the local ecology had been damaged, but some experts pointed out that the migration of elephants northward instead proved that Yunnan's ecology has progressed in recent years”

Global Times, Cui Fandi | June 14, 2021

Instead of being the outcome of failure, this migration is the outcome of success. Two different sides of the same coin.

Also, towards the end of the story and surrounding the happening of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15), this event triggered the attention of international organisations and experts and became the centre of many discussions. One of these discussions was on climate change, specifically a forum organised by the China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation (CBCGDF) with the theme “From conflict over resources to valuable allies in the fight against climate change: a new understanding of the importance of elephants” (Ji Yuqiao, 2021 August 12). However, despite being part of this forum, climate change is never directly mentioned in the article. It is never considered that this might be a climate change-induced event.

Temporality

The reporting from the *Global Times* mainly focuses on the present and the ongoing actions and reactions to this event. Hence the use of adverbs such as now (“are now wandering”) and currently (“They [elephants] are currently”) (May 30, 2021).

Beyond the present, there are different references to the past and future. The past is included to emphasise the uniqueness of this event across time. For instance, by calling it the “longest journey in the species' history” (June 14, 2021).

Meanwhile, the future is presented as a window of opportunity. There is a recurring call to action for future efforts to improve the situation. For example, the need to carry out landscape protection planning for Asian elephant habitats or to better improve the relationship between humans and animals. In one article, this future is presented as an anthropocentric one by appealing to a (human-defined) future:

"We want to understand and build what they need, so in the future the wild elephants will be able to comply with the national park plan."

Global Times, Xu Liuliu, Zhang Hui and Cui Fandi | October 14, 2021

Furthermore, this future is undefined, making this a timeless event that has a clear beginning yet an undefined ending, as seen by the use of adverbs and adjectives of probability:

"Attracted by food or others, they are highly likely to migrant again," Shen told media outlet Shangyou News."

Global Times | August 13, 2021

Connotation

Only a couple of times does *Global Times* present a slightly alarming tone by talking about the potential damage and harm between animals and humans. Instead, it focuses more on the opportunities that characterise it. The elephants' story might have changed (improved) the perception of China when it comes to environmental and biodiversity matters, as seen from foreign eyes:

"To Chinese people's surprise, these Western media outlets showed a 180-degree change compared with their long-standing biased smears and harsh tones. The elephants' stories are probably their most gentle news coverage about China in quite a few years. There is almost no nitpicking or sarcasm, and the majority of the reports are filled with novel, curious, and relaxed tones."

Global Times, Ai Jun | June 18, 2021

"Several foreign envoys and representatives of international organizations hailed China's handling of the wandering elephants as a vivid illustration of the country's biodiversity conservation achievements."

Global Times, Xu Liuliu, Zhang Hui and Cui Fandi | October 14, 2021

The herd's case is used and referred to as an example of success:

"The case was taken by the experts as a successful example on how to protect and guide the migration of wild elephants"

Global Times, Ji Yuqiao | August 12, 2021

What is also interesting is that unlike other media outlets who fed on the chaos and danger of this event, the *Global Times* focused more on the connection between animals and humans. For instance, it anthropomorphised the elephants by characterising them with human-like attributes like smartness, kindness, and family sense (October 12, 2021). In a way, it put the elephants at a level for humans to relate to.

5.1.4. From Local to International Coverage

Chinese media have gone to great lengths to update people about the whereabouts and wellbeing of these animals. Overall, the story started with an alarming tone, moved onto a poetic almost fairy-tale-like storytelling, until becoming a case of national pride and international praise. This latter aspect concerning global attention was a recurring characteristic emphasised as a key aspect for the audience to remember.

A quick look at European coverage at the time reveals several publications focusing on the herd. In Spain, *El País* reported on the mediatic sensation of the herd (Vidal Liy, 2021), *El Mundo* underlined the destruction and chaos of the migration (De La Cal, 2021), and *Diari ARA* looked into the mystery behind the cause (Bermúdez Jiménez, 2021). In France, they focused on the astonishment as seen in headlines such as "The long march of elephants shakes up China" from *Libération* (Defranoux, 2021) and "In China, the mysterious escape of a herd of elephants worries the country" from *Le Figaro* (2021). In Italy, *Corriere Della Sera* elaborated on the human resources deployed (Farina, 2021) and *Il Messaggero* provided an in-depth overview of the entire journey (Guaita, 2021). In the Netherlands, both the *Volkscrant* and the *NOS* highlighted how it was "a true rating hit" (Vlaskamp, 2021) and how "millions followed the herd of elephants in China" (Dorlo, 2021). In Germany, the long journey was also picked up by local media *Die Welt* (Petring, 2021) and *Der Tagesspiegel* (Ring, 2021).

In addition to Europe, there was also significant reporting done in other geographies like in the United States with the *New York Times* looking into the mystification of researchers in face of this migration (Wang, 2021) and *NBC News* proposing the possibility of this being

human-caused (Khurram & Hu, 2021); the United Kingdom with significant coverage from *The Guardian* (Sullivan, 2021) and *BBC* (2021); and Qatar's news agency *Al Jazeera* with an insightful podcast aimed at "unpacking the mystery around China's roaming elephants" (2021).

There are many other examples from the same and other regions across the globe. There were indeed some nuances between how the event was covered from within China in comparison to how it was reported internationally. But those nuances were not political differences. The event was covered almost the same globally, putting the focus on Chinese local response and the social media phenomena, while also wanting to answer the million-dollar question, "Why is this happening?". As Professor Rick Dunham from Tsinghua University said during an interview with *CGTN* on June 9th, 2021:

"The bottom line is that we journalists have a lot in common no matter where we are from. We want to tell good stories, we want to tell compelling stories that are interesting and important, and this one is a uniting kind of story because it doesn't have the political nor nationalistic sensitivities that tend to divide us"

It is not designed to be positive or negative, a hero versus villain story, but rather a story where everybody was trying to pitch in: the public authorities, social media and expert voices. How these stories were shaped, however, opens the door for further discussion.

6. PART II – STORY

"What we have to learn is not how to solve the problem, but how to increase tolerance. How can we use this event to let everybody pay attention to the issue of coexistence between people and animals?"

NEW YORK TIMES – Becky Shu Chen (Zoological Society Of London). September 3, 2021

When one of the most renowned and celebrated media outlets in the world opens an article with uncertainty and a call to mystery, there is something worth paying attention to. On June 3rd, 2021, the *New York Times* published an article by reporter Vivian Wang about the elephants' migration with the headline "15 Chinese Elephants Are on a Long March North. Why, No One Knows". Such a headline functions well as clickbait as the curiosity steers the reader to open the link, hoping to find out "Why" in the text. Yet, the article does not really answer the question. Quite the opposite. It reflects the unclarity and unlikeness at hand. It was the longest animal movement recorded in the country and "researchers are mystified". It could have been

they were looking for better food, they got lost, or they were just having a good time. “No one is quite sure” (2021).

How the ‘why’ was not addressed or resolved is what makes this part interesting because it helps define the frame constructed around this event, this story, by eluding the question.

As defined previously, multiple disciplines ranging from social sciences to communication studies have developed theories that define *framing*, and even *reframing*, as a process that influences how people interpret or process information. In media reporting, the notion of frame is the process by which reality is constructed by establishing a hierarchy of events, selecting only partial elements of a given situation, or focusing only on these elements to build or sustain an argument, neglecting the other parts that are consequently left in the background.

This dissertation followed the critical perspective that understands frames as mechanisms of representation of certain aspects of a given reality and has employed Critical Discourse Analysis to delimit it. The CDA perspective allows to develop an analytical view of how language is used in different social contexts (Fairclough, 2013), and by deconstructing texts and examining their social contexts of production it seeks to reveal different relevant aspects (being these ideological, social or others) behind it.

Following the initial analysis and taking its conclusions, this part aims to provide the space to “pause” and “reflect” to absorb the significance and meaning of this particular story by looking at the frame constructed around it. As argued by MIT lecturer Otto Scharmer in his book *Theory U*, “in order for transformative action and proactive outcomes to take root, it is essential to schedule time to reflect, to connect with a deeper, generative awareness, and to let fewer familiar perspectives contribute to new ways of understanding and new insights” (2016).

6.1. Common patterns

The three selected media outlets have different distribution and formats in which they report the news of the day. While *China Daily* is a daily newspaper that has been in production for over 40 years and *Global Times* is a tabloid that launched its English version in 2009, *CGTN* is a news channel, one of the six channels provided by the China Global Television Network, that was created in 1997. Yet, regardless of these different formats, all three share the same target audience (English-speaking readers and listeners) but also the fact that all three of them are

owned and under the control of the Chinese Communist Party. The direct ties with the political party have raised criticism from abroad on the lack of editorial autonomy and hence have been recurrently criticised for disinformation and for being Chinese government's propaganda apparatuses (Brady, 2015). *Global Times* has even been called “China’s Fox News” for its propagandistic slant and the monetization of nationalism (Larson, 2011).

The criticism of the lack of editorial truthfulness is relevant for this paper because it provides context to some of the aspects identified in the analysis. In fact, the study revealed that the editorials topicalized issues which romanticised situations rather than mitigate them. Through the exploration of words, phrases and clauses that functioned as *clickbaits*, the editorials benefited from this event to further elaborate on other aspects of the story. As such, three main elements characterised the story throughout and across all media outlets.

The first consistent aspect was the implicit need to take **ownership** of both the situation and individuals involved, especially if these were other-than-human animals. While at first the herd was simply addressed by their technical name (Asian elephant), their denomination was complemented with a national and cultural reference by adding the words “Yunnan” and “China” to their name. This reference did not appear right away but rather started to feature headlines towards the Spring and Summer of 2021, over a year later of the herd’s departure. As of that point, some repeated content and resonating keywords included emphasising that these were China’s or Yunnan’s migrating elephants, taking ownership of their existence, especially in face of the global following of their journey.

This latter aspect goes beyond a mere attribution and instead reveals a sociological tendency in discourse practices. As Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells puts it: “It is easy to agree on the fact that, from a sociological perspective, all identities are constructed. The real issue is how, from what, by whom and for what” (Castells, 2001).

In parallel, it was important to underline that this was an event followed by the entire world. The subjects of this story were not just a simple herd of 15 elephants but they were “China’s famous herd” and “China's migrating elephants” (*Global Times*), “China's wandering elephants” who were becoming “International Stars” (*China Daily*), or “Yunnan’s Migrating Elephants” and “China’s beloved elephants” (*CGTN*). These references made it in foreign coverage and, therefore, so did the subjects’ identification. In addition, it was not only about owning the herd but also about owning the situation. All spheres of society pitched in: Chinese residents expressing their concern and excitement, Yunnan’s task force commenting on the

arduous task, national authorities commenting on this event on global platforms, and Chinese experts evaluating the case. It was a story led by Chinese, owned by them yet, and contrarily and interestingly, not only for China. This concerns the target audience which will be explored in the following section.

The second common element has to do with the **power imbalance** perceived and experienced from non-human to human, and vice versa. There are several admirable things to point out from this event. These mainly concern the fact that no harm was caused to any of the individuals involved (humans and animals) and that the reported priority was to guide, not force, the herd to a safe place while also protecting humans along the way. Along these lines, it was essential to establish a close relationship between humans and animals to ensure peaceful cooperation and, in terms of reporting, this was done by presenting both parties as essential characters in the same plot, each one exercising a unique role.

Indisputably, it was the herd who set everything in motion – without them we would not be talking about this in the first place. Their trek, their tramping, strolling, raiding and wandering is what delimited the journey and story, though their carefree attitude was not sustainable in the long term as it was not safe and consequently their actions, their agency, started to be controlled by humans. Passive forms and shifts in topicalization reveal the ideological intentions. Towards the end of the journey, it became more and more evident that it was never really about the herd's movement (just another case of animal migration, albeit an exceptional one) but about the (human) actions that resulted from it.

Again, it is not a human-villain story, there is no good versus bad, but a clear agent-patient one: someone observing and someone being observed, someone steering and someone being steered, someone causing damage and someone cleaning up the damage. This latter is another example of how the power imbalance evolved. While the herd was at the beginning the trigger of chaos, harm and damage – their arrival was cause for concern as reported several times by *CGTN* with articles anticipating the chaos the herd's arrival might cause in populated areas. Human intervention brought peace of mind and admiration. Repeatedly, the discourse changed from being an animal-led story to a human-response one.

It goes without saying that it is of course difficult for the elephants themselves to have an active voice and a say in the matter. In this regard, it is important to point out that in spite the power imbalance, there is a discrete yet powerful and poetic call to action by the herd. Even if the agency went from animals to humans, the herd is the silent narrator. This is evident

with repeated acknowledgements that it is the herd to “highlight conservation message”, to “bring the world together”, and to “send an environmental message” (*China Daily*). In a way, they are playing the long game. The agency went from the herd triggered the event to humans dealing with it but it does not stop there. Even if not intended, there is an acknowledgement of other-than-human animals taking a role to ensure the so-called coexistence. Their behaviour is to be observed and analysed, especially in connection with the context in which we live: how their behaviour is responsive to other triggers in their surroundings, for both ecological and human reasons.

The third aspect is the discourse’s **connotative shift** which went from trivial and chaotic to unique and promising. Even though a high percentage of the articles were simple updates of the herd’s location, there is a consistent evolution in the way in which this event was perceived and shared. At the beginning of 2020, media coverage would tend to have a rather alarming tone by talking about the potential damage and harm between animals and humans, but this is rapidly replaced by a more positive connotation with references to celebration and victory. Gradually, press releases would focus more on international attention and positive local responses, brightening the rather initial darker tone.

The main argument that supports this sudden shift has to do with the cause of this migration which also experienced a transformation. At first, it seemed and it was speculated that the herd initiated this migration because of damaged living conditions, so the migration was the consequence of negligence and defeat. But as the story evolved, so did how the trigger was framed and a clear example of this can be read from a quote from a *Global Times* article on June 14th, 2021:

“Previously, there was speculation that wild elephants were leaving their habitat because the local ecology had been damaged, but some experts pointed out that the migration of elephants northward instead proved that Yunnan’s ecology has progressed in recent years” (Cui Fandi, 3 June 2021).

Instead of being the outcome of failure, this migration is the outcome of success. Now, the fact that all three media outlets have been considered to feed the wheel of propaganda is not a detail to leave ignored. That does not take the truth out of the equation but it helps understand around what stance the frame was constructed and from what perspective the audience should look at it, leaving other aspects out. For example, only once throughout the entire duration of the journey and in the more than 200 articles analysed was there a reference

to the coronavirus pandemic, and how lockdown was a time that incentivised wildlife to adventure into areas usually occupied by humans but in 2020 left unattended due to the pandemic. Not a factor to disregard if we want to understand why a herd of 15 elephants entered big cities when they usually would not.

Moreover, to support this rather victorious approach, there was a high number of articles that always concluded by including the following paragraph:

“Asian elephants are under A-level state protection in China, where they are mostly found in Yunnan. Thanks to enhanced protection efforts, the wild elephant population in the province have grown to about 300, up from 193 in the 1980s.”.

By comparing with the past and providing positive data, this statement is used to strengthen the celebratory tone of the event.

6.2. The frame

Asking ourselves what type of story this is allowed us to understand the event from an ontological perspective. That is, why is this any different from a regular animal migration, why is this unique in the context that we live in, and what potential does it hold over the present and the future. To be able to define it, the common patterns seen before are the building blocks of the frame and the attribution of the story. In addition, and beyond the linguistic categories, one must remember who held the pen when this story was being narrated to the world.

The anthropocentricity of this tale is of relevance because representation has to do with power. It is the powerful who have the chance to represent others (and themselves) in whatever way they find most fit. Metaphorically speaking, it is those who are powerful that give (or do not give) voice to those represented in their discourse practices (Tenorio, 2011). It is men who hold the pen and who have the power to arrange the ordering of events and give more or less prominence to those individuals who live it.

With this premise in mind, there are several ways to interpret this story. In the same way that there are many elements to consider, there are many different interpretations. However, because of those repeated elements and the continuous emphasis on key aspects, there is a strong and more prominent version of how this story is shaped.

A first interpretation is that this story is in one way framed as a **story of human progress**. Not knowing the why, despite “mystifying” and “puzzling” experts worldwide, did not seem to be a concern because it did not reflect a problem but rather exemplified a celebration.

The story changed from a story of chaos and uncertainty to a story of (human) success. Ironically, the reason for their migration was not because of the degradation of their habitat but rather the significant improvement of it: they did not leave because it was unsuitable, they left because their conditions had improved so much that the number of elephants had increased and there was no longer space for such a big number of animals. China's efforts were celebrated for their actions on biodiversity and species protection, as seen with the continued emphasis on the fact that the wild elephant population in Yunnan has grown from 193 in the 1980s to about 300 today; and they were celebrated for their coordinated response to guard, monitor, guide and protect this herd throughout their journey. The story "reflected the progress China has made in its wildlife conservation efforts" (Liuliu, Hui & Fandi, 2021).

Consequently, this event turned out to be the means needed to build **a story of redemption** for and by China. It was an opportunity to get the record straight – to rectify inaccuracies by foreign eyes and correct the portrayal of China's real efforts on conservation and biodiversity efforts as seen during a live broadcast on June 9th, 2021, by *CGTN*. It was the example needed for China to show the country's growing environmental awareness and harmonious coexistence between humans and animals, and the chance to reflect the way China is taking action to build a community of life together.

A contributing factor to strengthening this image and showing collective joint efforts in the eyes of the other is by involving local voices. Quotes from residents would express their concern over the damage and danger but also their amazement and respect for the species. Quotes from the task force would underline the difficult task but also the honour to learn from the animals. And representatives of international organisations and academic institutions (i.a. *Charity Save the Elephant*, Rare Animals and Plants Institute from China West Normal University, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies) would comment on the positive actions taken by local authorities. All in all, a story with no disagreement; all voices are on the same page.

Moreover, by redemption we understand an "act of redeeming or atoning for a fault or mistake" imposed or attributed by an external, and so redemption aims to change this attribution. In this case, it is an opportunity for redemption for a country in the eyes of the world. The target audience of this event is not only the local readership community but the globe as a whole. As stated before, it was a story led by Chinese, owned by Chinese, but not only for Chinese readers. In this regard, several articles would point out the international

attention but also the fact that for the first time foreign media would represent China and its actions in a positive tone instead of the recurrent accusatory voice.

But this redemption is not mentioned as such nor ever asked for because in a way this idea of redemption is **disguised as a story of coexistence**. The concept of coexistence is key throughout the entire journey and media coverage, it is the pillar of the story: the behaviour of all its characters, the objective to reach and the common thread around which the story revolves. This notion goes together with the one of harmony, both lying at the heart and being the cornerstones of traditional Chinese philosophy that aims to “strive for a harmonious world where everyone appreciates and shares each other’s beauty” (Zuo, 2020).

The story aimed to prioritise the country’s positive efforts in multispecies coexistence and a desire to move in that direction, rather than focusing on the tensions behind this potentially unsustainable coexistence, one that would have led to extreme cases such as the current one at hand. In line with this, the words *harmony* and *coexistence* act as trigger words for vindication: a correction of a wrongful portrayal in the eyes of foreigners.

By focusing all attention on the notion of coexistence, little space is left to look at the layers beneath it, the real meaning and implications of it. Although ideas about coexistence proliferate and have become a term used quite extensively in the last decade, mediatic attention to how it is being conceptualised and translated into practice is lacking. Foregrounding the concept yet omitting its meaning turns the concept into a positive-sounding label while it could be much more: the idea of coexistence has the potential to help facilitate transformative change in wildlife management.

In defence of the vocation of journalism, the choice of words and specific expressions used to report on this event should not be interpreted as a responsibility to fall on the journalists’ shoulders. On-site reporting and continuous updates reflect the speed under which the reporters operated: the pressure to meet a deadline to appear in printed versions, the need to collate quotes from people involved and footage of the herd, and the effort to stay on top of what was happening. Therefore, the repetition of patterns and same tendencies are a show of the dynamic in which they fell and the language that was constructed around this event; one article feeding off the other and belonging to the media spiral generated around it.

Nonetheless, this particular language (with its expressions, keywords and structure) stems from our day-to-day language and hence reflects how the human discourse is built in the first place, and especially how it is used to talk about the larger natural world and humanity’s

role in it. Therefore, they reflect our views and attitude towards other-than-human realities and how we, humans, position ourselves with these.

If we look at this event from an ecolinguistic point of view, the selected linguistic categories reveal that this case holds the potential of being a **story of awareness** as well. Although it turned out to benefit and heighten human intervention, this journey captured people's attention and put on their radar the importance of preserving these animals; an endangered species on the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Red List and is under China's first-class state protection.



Figure 10: A herd of wild elephants play in a small mud pool in Dalongtan township, Eshan county of Yuxi, Southwest China's Yunnan province, on June 19, 2021. [Photo/Yuxi Public Security Bureau].

Because they were the centre of attention, nature was for once made the protagonist of a story with an active role and a listened subject, even for a brief time, around which everything revolved, including humans. The presence of these elephants in human areas reshuffled the boundaries constructed between humans and other-than-human animals and seemed to propose an *ecological equilibrium*.

In addition, the uniqueness of this case was not only due to the exceptionality of this migration but also to the response by authorities and local communities, who responded with respect and care. Such a prolonged and close interaction as the one seen with these elephants and nature as a whole can enable knowledge, moral clarity, and caring attitudes towards the

world around us; not only for the direct people involved in the region but for a global readership. “It is through contact—not separation—that we may come to see things from a different perspective. Restricting our interaction with nature, enclosing ourselves in a technological bubble so that things can keep going in a business-as-usual modality would drive us in the opposite direction” (Foggin et al., 2021).

Overall, it was and still is an example of environmental communication because the way in which it was reported has far-reaching effects. The multiple call-to-actions (CTAs) for more sustainable actions, better coexistence, and increased protection to develop in the future pointed to that direction (although for some politically biased), which is significant if we consider that we live in a time of largely human-caused crises.

Nevertheless, the discourse often prioritised romanticising the human response rather than looking deeper into the other-than-human actions and why human-animal relationships are being reshaped the way they are.

These elephants did not just go on a stroll but, as the media would frame it, they were migrating. The concept of ‘migration’, however, is not addressed properly; the term is used quite loosely. On the one hand, when we talk about migration we understand that it is a movement from one part to another, which with animals often has to do with the change of a season. In this case, not only was it not directly season-related but there did not seem to be an obvious destination. Besides, it was an odd choice of direction, moving northwards where temperatures are colder, food is scarcer and areas are more human-populated. On the other, the verb *to migrate* was often replaced by *to wander* and *to linger* which implies a sense of disorientation. Only a couple of times did an expert voice correct this imprecise terminology and proposed *to disperse* instead: to scatter in different a direction and towards larger areas. Similarly, the word *exodus* also came forward which like the word *disperse* carries a proactive role in the action, a conscious decision, a reaction to something.

All these words carry meaning and while some romanticise the situation, others move in the opposite direction by hinting at their migratory status. Because it might seem that the story ended with the eventual return of the herd to their natural habitat, but reality shows that this story is far from finished. What this event has opened is the need for a bigger understanding of the animal’s behaviour with their surroundings and how their response to this changed setting has broader implications. What this can mean and how this story, its language, is important will be analysed in the following chapter.

7. PART III – OUTCOMES

"We have to know that conservation will come with problems. They are desirable problems, which we want to have, because they are the consequence of success. But we have to manage them. We cannot be simplistic. We have to understand that there are interests that are not compatible: we cannot have all the development we want and at the same time have nature and animals. We have to see how to achieve as much as possible in both fields... And that requires a little bit of compromise"

EL PAÍS – Macarena Vidal Liy. June 12, 2021

As a story in itself, this particular case was narrated in a way to serve as the means to heighten human efforts and a country's response to a unique situation. The linguistic choices, conscious and unconscious ones, constitute the building block of a human-centred frame that puts an assertive emphasis on present responses and a less certain one on the past that triggered it along with an ambiguous portrayal of future actions. As seen through different forms of vagueness, the level of certainty in the reporting decreases whenever the reason for this migration is put into question.

The following section aims to solidify the insights gained from the reflection and respond to the new information and ideas that emerged in the previous stage. Its goal is to take the previously employed linguistic and narrative elements and outline their meaning within the current context.

Before, however, we will take a step back from linguistics and focus on ethology in order to learn about the species' usual behaviour and, thus understand whether from an ethological perspective, this migration could or could not be considered unique, as reported consistently by all media outlets. Following this initial part, the second block looks at how the story of the 15 elephants eluded the 'why', this being the cornerstone of the entire event, and what emerged from this form of omission – it pays attention to positive outcomes (i.a. enhancements of values of coexistence and harmony, environmental awareness) as well as the contemporary topics left in the grey (i.a. climate change, coronavirus pandemic). Thirdly and consequently, it observes the link between the animals' studied behaviour and the context surrounding the story, delimiting its uniqueness ontologically in a time of rare events marked by the Anthropocene.

By focusing on the unresolved mystery wrapped around the reason, this section focuses on the aftermath of the story and its implications for environmental reporting and

communication and the influence it can have on conservation biology practices. The goal is to identify *how* and *why* this particular case could be a *story to live by*.

7.1. An ethological approach on the wandering elephants

A frequent feature in the herd's reporting was the emphasis on the exceptionality of this migration and the perplexity it caused among experts. In addition, the elephants were often portrayed as individuals who were leading, owning, their own actions; actions that were not ultimately justified. The difference between this migration compared to other animal movements was the rarity behind the species' behaviour. Could their trek be a behavioural adaptation to changed natural conditions or was it just a trivial decision? It was also portrayed as rare because it did not fit into the studied behaviour of this particular animal. If we wish to address the relevance of this case, it is first important to understand how this species is positioned in today's society, how it acts and how it is perceived from an anthropocentric eye.

The **field of ethology** is concerned with such aspects. First summarised by Nikolaas Tinbergen in his work *The Study of Instinct* (1951), ethology is defined as the scientific study that focuses on animal behaviour – including animal communication, predation, defence, aggression, mating, imprinting, fixed action patterns and releasers, and migration—most often in their natural conditions. It takes many forms and diverse subdisciplines derive from it, but one major facet among all is the study of instinct (behaviours that animals inherit and exhibit without reason) versus learning (behaviours animals develop during their lifetimes) (Tinbergen, 1951).

Ethology plays a huge role in many fields and it is especially relevant when it comes to animal welfare and conservation. It clarifies the interactions between animals, humans and the environment (Appleby & Mitchell, 2018), making it a very relevant discipline in a context where these interactions have reached a delicate point.

Over the last decade, scientific research has revealed how human overpopulation and overexploitation of natural resources are fuelling climate change, leading to dramatic deterioration and destruction of habitats, and a massive decline in biodiversity. The 2020 biodiversity assessment of the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) fully confirms this and carries to the general public what some biologists have argued for long: that both “biodiversity and climate change are both wicked

problems with high uncertainty, contested values, and unclear policy pathways, yet high urgency to act” (Pörtner et al., 2021).

In face of this, **ethology harbours ample potential** to aid understanding of, and sometimes in finding solutions to, real-world conservation problems (Greggor et al., 2016). In an article from *Ethology* magazine written by researchers Wolfgang Goymann and Martin Küblbeck (2019), several examples of animal behaviour are brought forward. Among other cases, they argue how migratory animals rely on a whole chain of suitable habitats, resources and conditions that are adequately aligned in space and time to continue to thrive (Vickery et al., 2014). Migrants, they continue, “are thus particularly vulnerable if small but critical fractions of their annual habitats get destroyed, if resources become limited on critical stop-over sites, or because climate change may result in phenological mismatches between consumers and food resources”.

The magazine presents other examples of how ethological research has and is still today demonstrating how global change is threatening the well-being, reproduction and performance of different animals, and that therefore ethology has a role to play in recognising, understanding and on occasion ameliorating or solving human-generated problems.

This present dissertation focuses on the migratory example because its geographical scale makes migrating individuals particularly vulnerable to climate change, and at the same time, the process of migration has fundamental impacts on ecological processes and biodiversity (Seebacher & Post, 2015). It further elaborates on it by paying closer attention to how elephants, specifically the Asian elephant, have been studied so far and what behavioural changes can be perceived from this particular so-called migration and its association with the current context. Because, with a commanding presence as theirs, any actions and activities that break with the ordinary are not left unnoticed.

Looking more closely at the **Asian elephant** (*Elephas Maximus*), there are some facts to know and present about this species. This animal constitutes one of the world's largest land mammals on the planet. They usually live in matriarchal societies, and the members of the group are mainly female and young elephants, whereas adult male elephants only join the group during mating season (Fangyu, 2020). They are megaherbivore animals and, considering their huge size, they spend up to 16 to 18 hours eating roots, trees and bark every day, of which an adult elephant can eat up to 100–300 kg of food and 80–200 L of water daily. These activities

are usually carried out during the night, as elephants are crepuscular animals: they typically sleep during the day and are most active at dawn and dusk.

In terms of locality nowadays, the Asian elephant mainly lives in forested regions of India and throughout Southeast Asia, including Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Laos. Since 1986, it is classified as endangered by the IUCN, after observations that its population had declined by an estimated 50 per cent over the past 75 years.

In China, they only live in Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, Pu'er and Lincang cities in southern Yunnan Province, with 95 per cent of the wild population residing in the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve. They are generally sedentary animals with well-defined home ranges, but as the largest terrestrial animal, elephants are quintessential wide-ranging animals. Historical findings have proven that elephants did live elsewhere in China in the past. There are fossil records that show that Asian elephants conducted large-scale migrations. For example, more than 7,000 years ago they reached as far north as the Yellow River basin (Wen, 1995) but due to gradual cooling and increased human activities in the following years, they gradually retreated to southwestern Yunnan Province. Elephants also carried out short-distance migrations during the 1960s and 1990s (Wang et al., 2021).

Even if they mainly live in one particular region, elephants still require a relatively large space to live and move, but habitat loss throughout the past decades has made it a challenge. Territorial conflicts have arisen between humans and elephants around the national nature reserve, and their habitat has shrunk by nearly two-thirds since the 1990s. Current elephant habitat is highly fragmented and consists of isolated patches situated among extensive stretches of tea and rubber plantations, and croplands (Zhang, 2011).

Threats to wild Asian elephant populations, however, do not only include habitat loss due to deforestation and agricultural development but also conflict with humans as elephants seek space and raid crops grown close to their forest habitats (Daly, 2018). In fact, having lived side by side with farmers in Yunnan for many years and their strictly protected status has emboldened the animals. Moreover, being the intelligent creatures that they are (they have a highly evolved neocortex, similar to humans, and demonstrate a wide variety of behaviours associated with high intelligence, including compassion, mimicry, grief, altruism, use of tools, and self-awareness (Jabr, 2014)), they know the right time to find tasty food like sugarcane in croplands near the rainforest.



Figure 11: A herd of wild elephants feeds on crops in a field in Yimen county, Yuxi, Yunnan province, on June 16, 2021. [YUXI PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU].

On top of that, elephants are known for their sharp memory and follow the same migration paths for decades. Even a minor change or hindrance on their usual migration route confuses them, occasionally triggering human-animal conflict in the region.

For instance, from 1991 to 2004, the wild Asian elephants in Xishuangbanna caused a total loss of about 44,530 tons of crops (Fangyu, 2020), and between 2011 and 2015 about 48,000 incidents were reported of elephants ravaging cropland and injuring people (CGTN, 2020 October 30). A similar outcome has been identified from the *wandering elephants*. Several reports stated that the herd was connected to 412 separate incidents of damage along its 1000-km journey, causing about 6.8 million yuan (1.1 million EUR) in damage to farmlands.

Regardless of this, decades of efforts by the Chinese government have yielded substantial achievements in improving human-elephant coexistence in southwestern Yunnan and in the protection and conservation state of Asian elephants. Since 1988, Asian elephants are listed as a class I protected wildlife species under the Wildlife Protection Law (Zhang, 2007). China has also implemented the Forest Law and the Wildlife Protection Law, and the authorities in

Yunnan have introduced regulations and rules that offer strong legal support to the construction of nature reserves and the protection of wild animals and their habitats. To this extent and as reported continuously, the elephant population in China has increased steadily in the last years: from less than 150 in the 1960–1970s to 216–243 in 2016, and to around 300 in 2018 (Zhao & Jin, 2018).

PROTECTED AREAS
<p>Over the same period, China has increased its efforts in biodiversity conservation, including a massive expansion of the protected area (PA) system (Xu et al., 2019). As defined by the IUCN, protected areas are a mainstay of biodiversity conservation. They are at the core of efforts towards conserving nature and underscoring the vital services natural ecosystems provide, while also playing an important role in helping mitigate and adapt to climate change.</p> <p>In China, there are more than 11,800 protected areas, covering over 18 per cent of its land area. There are numerous types of PAs with diverse goals for ecosystems, landscapes, natural resources, relics, and others. Among these, stand out the nature reserves, which are the strictest type of protected area. By 2017, China had established 2750 nature reserves covering 1.47 million km². The Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve, where the <i>wandering elephants</i> reside, is among these nature reserves. It is composed of five subreserves, Mengyang, Menglun, Mengla, Shangyong, and Mangao, which are not connected to each other. The main protected objects of the nature reserve are the tropical forest, the evergreen broad-leaved forest in the south subtropics, and the rare and endangered wild animal and plant populations and their living environment in the tropics and southern subtropics.</p>

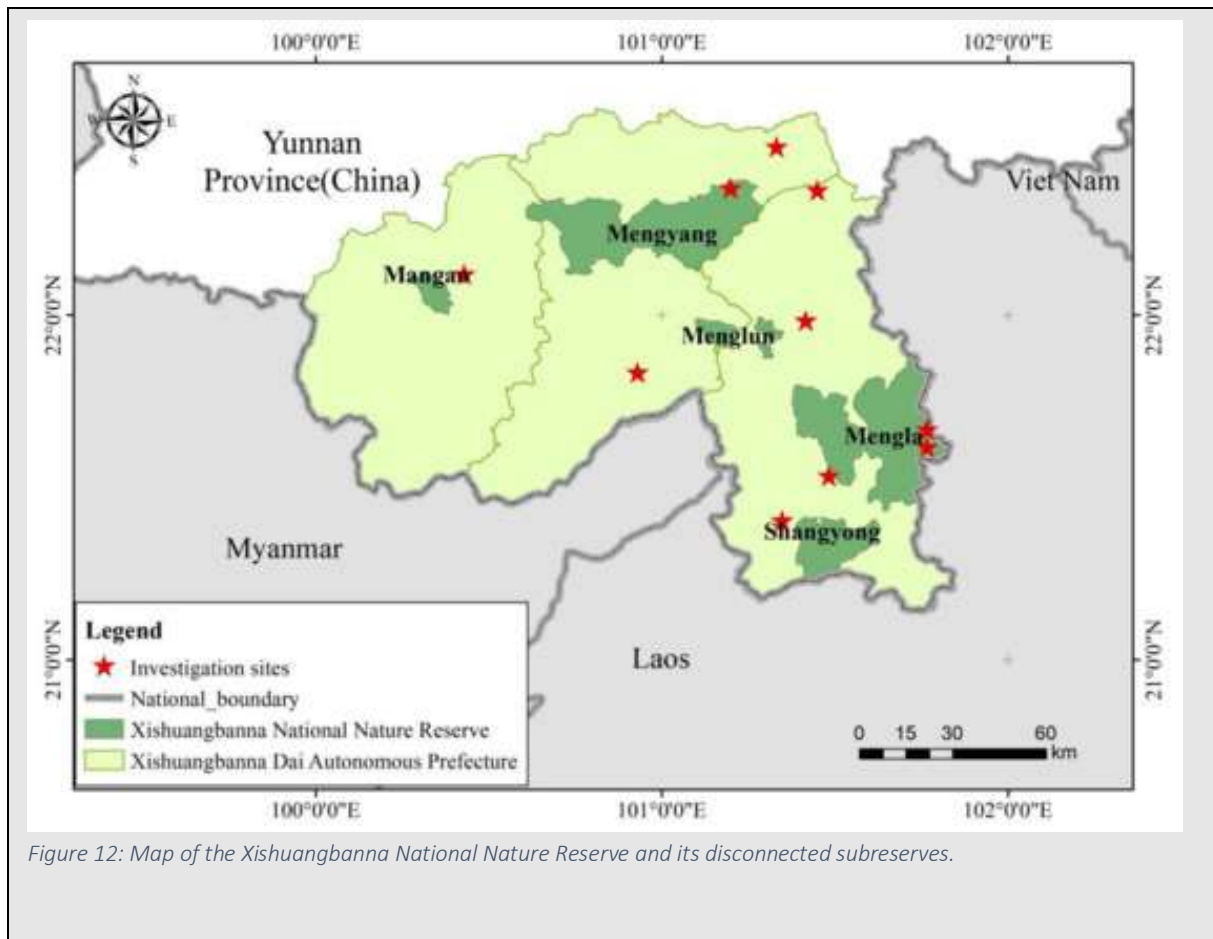


Figure 12: Map of the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve and its disconnected subreserves.

It was not until 2020 that this species embarked again on a long-distance journey across China, trekking into areas where they had been absent for centuries and stepping into the international spotlight as an exceptional phenomenon. Ethologically speaking, the *wandering elephants* were considered unique in contrast to the species' behaviour in the past.

The Yunnan herd was different because of its scale and because the elephants moved into densely populated areas. Their behaviour was defined as "unique", "rare", "puzzling" and "eye-opening". From an anthropocentric perspective, they showed a daring attitude by crossing their natural habitat and *trespassing* into the human domain: they crashed into people's houses, roamed city streets, ate from crops, and drank water from farms. However, their presence in agricultural land is not as rare as it might seem to foreign eyes as the animal's adventures in these human areas have increased in the past years, with growing incidents since the early 2000s. Normally, these episodes occur with the animals eventually returning to their habitat but in this case it was carried to other unexpected regions.

Taking into account that the Asian elephant is considered "one of Earth's most intelligent animals", the behaviour of this particular herd should not be considered arbitrary nor neglected

as an important characteristic in their story. As a highly cognitive creature, there was an active choice to continue a path after evaluating the lack of danger (human presence or interference), high availability of food and potentially better conditions. In addition, elephants are social animals, that is, they are guided by a leader (in this case a female leader) but move like a group.

To explain what prompted the trek, several hypotheses were brought forward, from habitat shrinkage, food shortages and population growth to opportunistic behaviour, straying of the herd's leader, and geomagnetic change (Wang et al., 2021). Editorially, these speculations were presented with little certainty (no substantial analysis was carried out at the time) and thus the narrative derailed to other topics, which will be described in the following section.

7.2. The unresolved why: A focus on a 'harmonious coexistence'

Not being able to answer why the herd embarked on this journey did not push readers away but paradoxically it pulled them in. In the articles analysed, the concept of *mystery* functioned as a keyword for clickbait and often accompanied by a sense of wonder and fascination. Furthermore, the different texts did not resolve this mystery because the focus shifted to other more editorially relevant topics: articles tended to foreground notions of harmony and coexistence instead.

We have seen how all the way, millions of Chinese and others from all around the globe watched the herd's movements. As a result, one of the more positive consequences is that care for another species increased. It opened conversations on social media platforms, bringing civil society to take part in the discussion, and galvanized greater awareness of environmental problems in a nation that, despite great strides, remains the world's worst polluter (Campbell, 2021b). In addition, quotes from local communities usually expressed fear for the animal but also deep admiration for it.

The respectful responses by local authorities and the public at large were received with international praise which feed into the traditional image that China once embodied and aspires to embody again: a civilisation based on harmonious coexistence between all.

Harmony has traditionally been a central concept in Chinese thought, and to this day continues to shape how a great percentage of people in China think. Although there are various meanings and implications of harmony (Li, Düring & Kwok, 2021), it is safe to argue that the concept of harmony stands for an ideological system that consists of not only values but also a

philosophy with its own world outlook that ultimately seeks to attain a **harmonious equilibrium in the world**. In Taoism, for instance, believers are instructed how to exist in harmony with the universe, whereas Confucianism puts tremendous weight on interpersonal harmony and on the harmony between human society and the natural world (Micunovic, 2019).

In parallel, the term '**coexistence**' is increasingly being used by academics and practitioners to reflect a re-conceptualisation of human-wildlife interactions. In the last couple of years, the term coexistence has become a popular buzzword and is central to several proposals for transformative change in biodiversity conservation, including convivial conservation (Massarella & Fiasco, 2022).

This image of a harmonious coexistence between all, usually reduced to ancient times, is something China wants to advocate for again. This idea of “building a homeland of harmonious coexistence between man and nature” (2021), as China’s President Xi Jinping expressed in his keynote speech during the leaders' summit of the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Kunming in 2021.



Figure 13: President Xi Jinping speaks at the Cop15 media centre in Kunming in October 2021. The UN biodiversity conference has been moved to Montreal after Covid-related delays. [Photograph: AFP/Getty Images].

At COP15, the so-called elephant runners provided a testimony that reflects these values of harmony and coexistence. They revealed to the *Global Times* the behind-the-scenes details of their own story, expressing their amazement about the intelligence, trust and family sense

of these animals (Liuliu, Hui & Fandi, 2021). They explained how it was an arduous task yet filled with rewards and an essential learning curve, both for them and the public at large. The dedication and care were continuous throughout the entire journey. For example, during the herd's last 10 kilometres, the task force sprayed water on the road surface of a bridge as it was burning hot, cooling it for when the elephants had to set foot and therefore not hurt the soled of their feet, explained Professor Chen Mingyong from Yunnan University to *CGTN* (Jinghao, 2021 December 31).

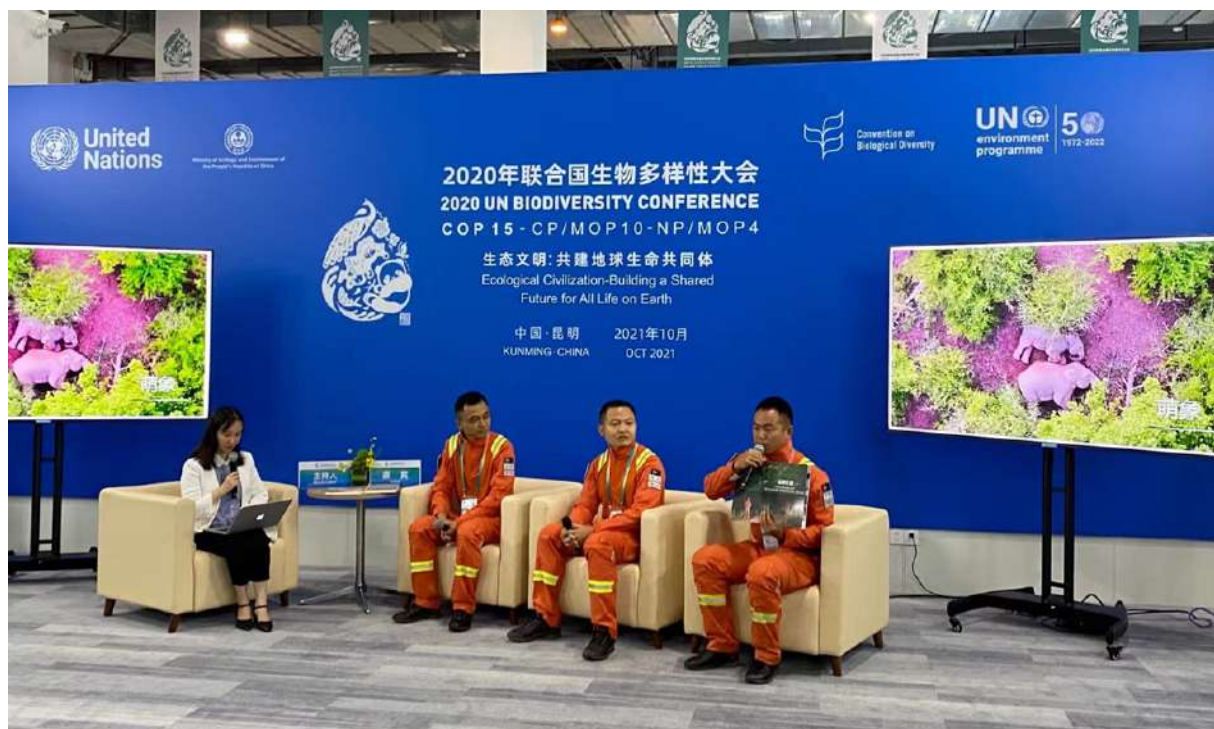


Figure 14: Elephant runners at COP15 [Photo- Xu Liuliu/*Global Times*].

Also, Professor Shahbaz Khan, Director and UNESCO Representative to China, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia and the Republic of Korea, highlighted that this is not only about the elephants. As Khan told *Global Times*, the story reached a level where people now know how to take care of a very important species like the Asian elephant, as another baby elephant was born during their journey. People also know how to use technologies like drones to track them, and have a system where people who are affected by the elephants can be compensated (Liuliu, Hui & Fandi, 2021).

Even a year after the journey started, the front-page story was still remembered by the public as is shown in a temporary exhibition at the Yunnan Provincial Museum which displays more than 100 pictures captured during the task force's mission to guard these animals.

According to a member of the Yunnan Forest Fire Brigade, Zhang Fanbing, the idea is to eventually expand the show into a base for ecological education with more exhibits: “Our task to search and monitor the migrating herd is over, but the undertaking to protect elephants and protect biodiversity should be pushed ahead” (Jinghao & Caiwen, 2022).



Figure 15: Visitors look at a picture about the migrating herd shown at Yunnan Provincial Museum [CGTN].

Environmental awareness and multispecies coexistence were, for once, the guiding principle characterising the story. By foregrounding ideas related to living in harmony with other species, in finding coexistence among all, these *wandering elephants* allowed to make the case for the nation’s *rebrand* in foreigners’ eyes. They “enabled people to get a glimpse of the coexistence of man and nature and raised people's awareness in wildlife protection”, said President Xi Jinping at COP15 (2021). The topic of human-wildlife coexistence was added to the Summit’s agenda in honour of the migrating herd and during the conference they were largely featured, with a dedicated panel on the elephant runners and the showing of a short movie by Yunnan Media Group called *Elephants’ Journey in Yunnan* (2021).



Figure 16: A video of a herd of wild Asian elephants that went astray in Southwest China's Yunnan Province in September is shown on a big screen at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity [Photo Li Hao/GT].

With the 15 elephants, the concept was brought forward repetitively, but the practicalities and real life-changing implications (economically for farmers and socially for those who would affect the most) behind this coexistence were either left vague or omitted altogether.

By prioritising these idyllic scenarios and emphasising rather ambiguous realities, other more important aspects are left behind. Therefore, understanding the root causes and mechanisms of elephants' population expansion, which is considered an endangered species, is crucial for making a better conservation strategy. Furthermore, by not addressing this question and neglecting the triggers behind the migration, we ignore an important part of these individuals' behaviour who took, for some reason or another, an active decision.

From an ecolinguistic point of view, the story of the *wandering elephants* made space for ecological behaviour, making environmental awareness and multispecies care central to the narrative. It also established a dialogue between man and nature, with humans for once at the receiving and listening end of it. However, it was an exercise half done because it failed to give the cause, the reason, the why, the attention it deserved in the story.

7.3. Reactions to the Anthropocene

On June 12th, 2021, reporters Yang Zhao and Yang Xiao published an article in *CGTN* that said: “Whatever the real reasons are, many scientists, including [Professor] Guo, are confident that human activities and climate change have had an impact on such animal behaviour, putting land and resources under increasing strain and causing a rise in human-elephant conflict in the last 10 years” (2021).

According to this expert voice, who is a Professor at Xianming and Head of the Research Institute of Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve in Yunnan, the two causes identified (human activities and climate change) are considered influential factors. This is among the few cases that climate change was presented as a cause, or that the cause was even extensively discussed.

A closer look at this statement, and with the support of scientific research on the matter, reveals significant insights that deserve to be explained properly.

These so-called “human activities” mainly refer to increasing **human encroachment** into animal habitats and large-scale human engineering developments. These activities have caused the shrinkage and fragmentation of elephants’ reserves in the last couple of decades and exacerbated the ‘islanding’ of their habitats. This means that the traditional buffer zones between humans and elephants are gradually disappearing, and consequently the chances of elephants encountering humans increase greatly (Sullivan, 2021).

In Xishuangbanna, for example, the natural reserve originally spread across 2,400 square kilometres, but once tea and rubber plantations came up (which experienced a huge expansion during the 2000s), the reserve was **divided into five sub-zones** (Mengyang, Menglun, Mengla, Shangyong, and Mangao) not connected to each other and with no natural corridors for the elephants (Gupta, 2022),

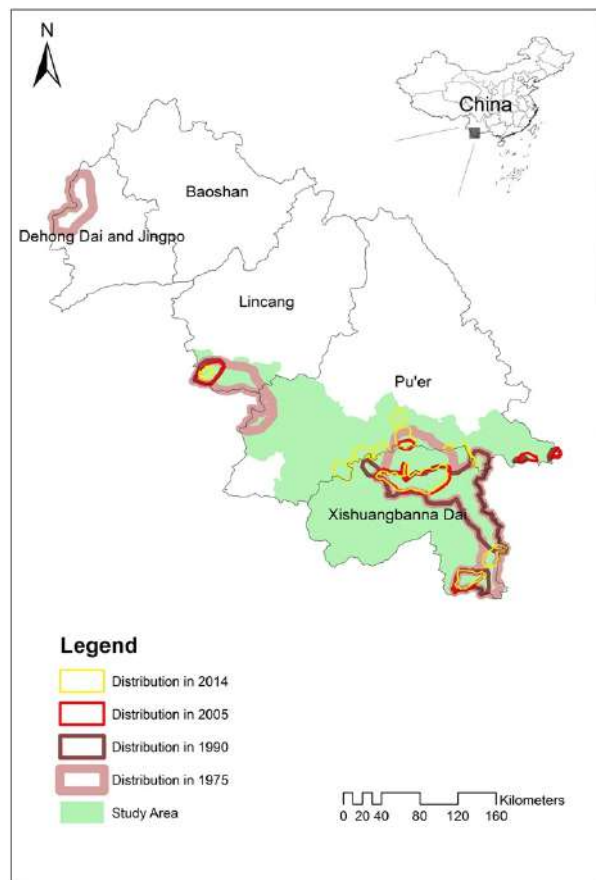


Figure 17: Distribution areas of Asian elephants in 1975, 1990, 2005 and 2014.

reducing the species' habitat by more than 40 per cent (Fandi & Lin, 2021), cutting off the elephants' migration paths and restraining them to these so-called "ecological islands".

In parallel to habitat reduction, the number of wild Asian elephants in the province increased during the same period. Having more elephants yet less land to live in inevitably makes it an incompatible growth and forces these animals who, unable to get enough food in the rainforest, move to the edge of the forest and come to inhabited villages and farmlands in search of food (Fandi, 2021).

In addition to human interference, climate change is also presented as an influential factor. As argued repeatedly by scientific research, **climate change** has been shown to affect recent global distribution changes of a broad range of mammal species (Walther, 2001). Human alteration of ecosystems has and is still causing global disruptions of animal movements, with potential knock-on effects on populations, communities, and ecosystem function (Tucker et al., 2018). On top of that, anthropogenic activities are also considered culpable of degrading suitable habitats where mammal species could live (Scanes, 2018), consequently altering the way animals move particularly wide-ranging species.

7.3.1. Climate change migration: A multispecies phenomenon

Both human and non-human species are responding to this changing environment with adaptation in the form of movements. Some of these movements, triggered by climate alterations that have negatively impacted one's habitat, are being acknowledged and attributed as **climate change migration**, others as environmental migrants and some as environmental refugees – a denomination that has not yet settled in everyday language. These terms, however, are usually used to address human movements.

In 2007, the International Organization on Migration (IOM) put forward a broad working definition of Environmental Migration. This definition was and still is the following:

“Environmental migrants are persons or groups of persons who, predominantly for reasons of sudden or progressive change in the environment that adversely affects their lives or living conditions, are obliged to leave their habitual homes, or choose to do so, either temporarily or permanently, and who move either within their country or abroad” (IOM, 2007:33).

As we can see, this is a human-centred definition but the meaning within is quite exhaustive – it captures the complexity at stake. It shows that environmental migration can

take many complex forms: it can be forced and voluntary, temporary and permanent, of proximity and long distance, and many more.

It is deliberately broad and flexible in order to account for all kinds of movements deriving from all types of environmental drivers, some of which also can be applied to more-than-human movements.

On top of all, we must consider that China is home to the world's largest population of internal migrants (Liang, Li & Ma, 2014) and is highly vulnerable to climate change (Zhao et al. 2016). But when we talk about climate change migrants the first thought is human populations, which raises the question of whether in China those 15 elephants were seen as climate-change migrants. As seen, it was *TIME Magazine* that labelled these elephants as climate change migrants (Campbell, 2021), but again without contextualising this attribution any further; nor did any of the articles from *CGTN*, *Global Times* and *China Daily*.

There is little reference to any climatic influence that might have triggered the move or even determined the herd's behaviour throughout, despite rigorous and scientific data that has placed the effects of climate change in the country. Yet, recent scientific research has revealed that the ongoing expansion of China's small Asian elephant population is not only associated with strict protection and broad-scale socioeconomic changes but also with climate change (Campos-Arceiz et al., 2022).

In the event of this herd's journey, three relevant papers have analysed the associations between climate change and human impacts on the recent range expansion of Asian elephants in southwest China. All of these papers were published in the second half of 2022, allocating enough time for analysis and data comparison; except one which was released in July 2021, which is included and referenced in the papers that would follow.

As presented in **an analysis published in the interdisciplinary journal *The Innovation*** (Wang et al., 2021), the beginning of the herd's march coincided with two climatic alterations. On the one hand, 2019-2020 were 1.6°C higher than in 1981–2010, following a trend of steady annual mean temperature increase since the late 1990s. On the other, the region experienced a noticeable precipitation decrease in 2019 and 2020 which, in combination with high temperatures, led to an extreme drought throughout 2020 and especially during March 2020, the exact month when this herd of elephants started their northward journey. Moreover, an extremely hot-dry climate also caused sharp degradation in herbaceous and shrub plants, which elephants feed off. According to the paper, these conditions eventually triggered the

movement of the herd to more abundant food and water sources in human settlement areas or farmlands.

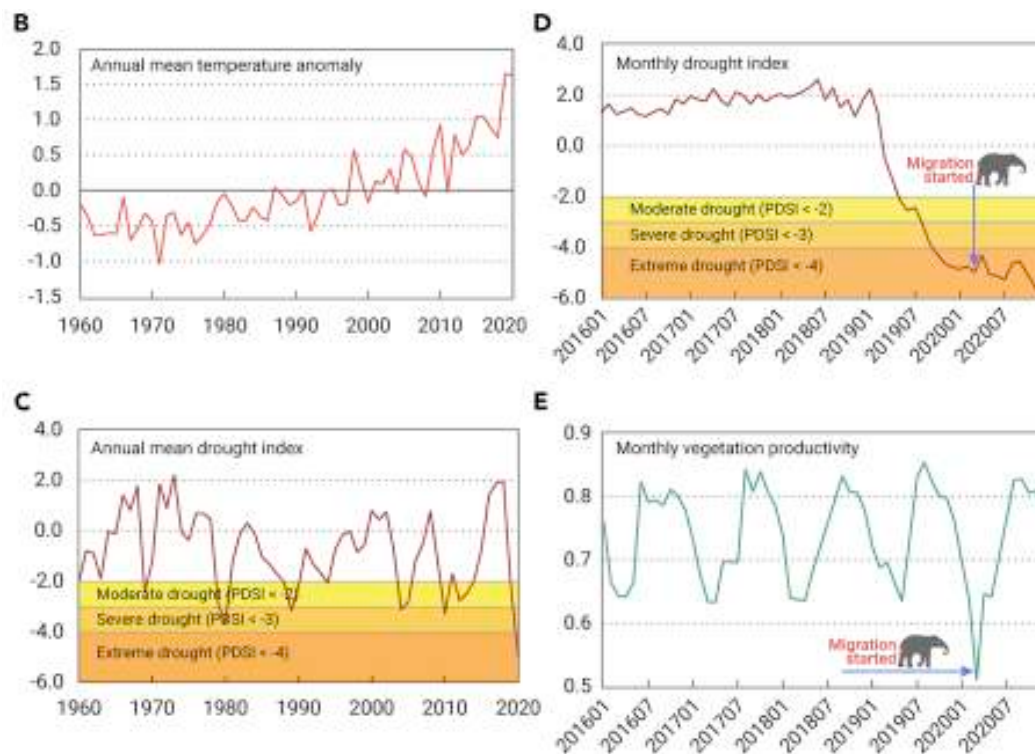


Figure 18: Climatic changes over Xishuangbanna.

(B) Annual mean temperature anomaly ($^{\circ}\text{C}$) from 1960 to 2020 relative to the 1981–2010 climate.

(C) Annual mean drought index from 1960 to 2020.

(D) Monthly drought index from Jan 2016 to Dec 2020.

(E) Changes of vegetation productivity in the Mengyang Nature Reserve where the herd of Asian elephants started their northward migration.

A second research paper from the *Frontiers in Ecology and Evolution* journal (Bai et al., 2022), further elaborates on these identified causes. They propose a method to evaluate associations of the recent range expansion with climate and environmental variables (including temperature, precipitation and human population density) based on historical records of the first observations of elephants in a new place in a specific year.

In line with the data provided by *The Innovation* article, their study found that Asian elephants in Yunnan have shown changes in distribution and obvious northward movement since 1990, which has gone in parallel to an increase in air temperature during the same period. As such, the recent northward range expansion suggests that climate warming was likely associated with their movement towards areas with more human settlements in China. In addition, the herd's movements in 2021 were suspected to be connected to food shortages due to the hot and dry weather from 2019 to 2020. They also point out that the increased bold

behaviours of elephants in the modern era and their enforced protection have led to more and more elephants' *spottings* beyond their natural reservoirs.

In fact, since the 1990s, elephants have become accustomed to eating crops and living among people. They tend to move from the nature reserves and brazenly invade areas of human settlements with plenty of water and high-quality food resources, increasing the risk of human-wildlife conflicts (Bai et al., 2022).

The **third relevant research paper from the *Integrative Conservation* journal** was written by Dr. Ahimsa Campos-Arceiz, a Spanish professor at Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden of the Chinese Academy of Sciences who was thoroughly quoted in both local and international media, who together with other researchers analysed the movement attributes and body condition of these elephants to understand this unusual behaviour and its implications for megafauna conservation in the Anthropocene.

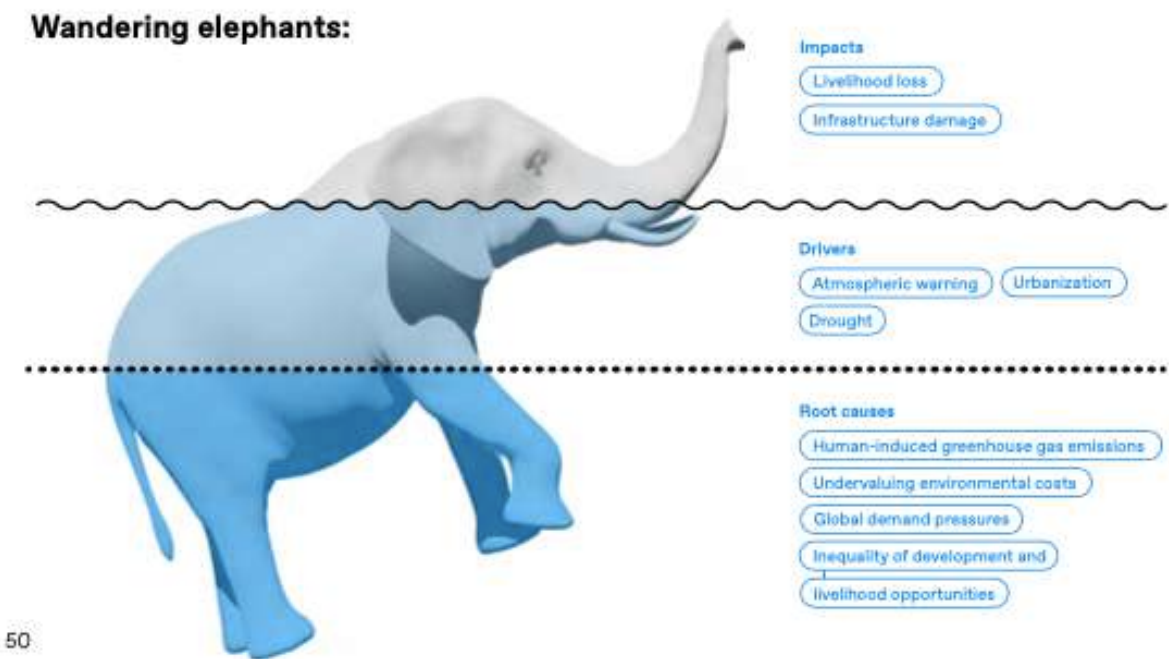
Based on historical data that showed past elephants' migrations towards northern regions, they put this case within a timeline that ranges across history and introduce this recent range expansion as a "re-occupation of the elephants' original distribution area" (Campos-Arceiz et al., 2022), albeit centuries old. Therefore, we could argue that their behaviour is not only representative of an adaptive trait to environmental conditions but a sensitive, conscious response.

They also observe the type of movement of this herd and explain how there are exceptional circumstances under which female herds (such as this one) may disperse and shift their home range when a drastic environmental change renders their home range unsuitable (Sukumar, 2003). The study also indicates that the trajectory followed by the elephants to Kunming cannot be classified as a migratory behaviour. Instead, they found that the herd's movements are consistent with a form of partial and irruptive nomadism or failed dispersal rather than migration, as the elephants moved away from familiar landscapes. Throughout their journey, the elephants made unusual habitat choices, such as crossing landscapes with higher nightlight intensity and travelling close to towns and villages populated by humans. Contrary to their usual choices, they avoided areas with high forest cover, which was interpreted as habituation to feeding on crops and a lack of fear of people. In addition, the elephants showed "high body condition scores and had successfully delivered two babies, both indicators of good health, suggesting that their decision to leave their previous home range had paid off" (Campos-Arceiz et al., 2022).

UNITED NATIONS INTERCONNECTED DISASTER RISKS REPORT (2021):

The *wandering elephants*' migration occurred as a result of the convergence of factors. Habitat degradation and fragmentation from increasing encroachment of rubber plantations, driven by demand for natural rubber from global industries in the last decades, created an inequality of opportunities in different areas in terms of habitat quality for the elephants. As their local habitats in Yunnan became increasingly degraded, a drought (influenced by climate change) became the ultimate push to seek opportunities for their basic needs elsewhere.

Causes: human-induced greenhouse gas emissions, undervaluing environmental costs, global demand pressures and inequality of development and livelihood opportunities.



50

Figure 19: Illustration extracted from the United Nations University (UNU) – Institute for Environment and Human Security [UNU-EHS] (2022) “Interconnected Disaster Risks”.

7.3.2. Wildlife thriving amidst coronavirus pandemic

Until now, research has focused on climate change as an influential factor in the herd's movements – something that editorials either ignored or unfavoured in front of other more appealing topics such as harmony and coexistence. Through forms of modal verbs of possibility, the association is shily and very rarely included. Rather than looking back to contextualise the event, news releases emphasised ongoing (human) efforts or future actions that would result

from this event (e.g.: the birth of an ecological civilisation, increased conservation efforts, creation and expansion of natural parks...). In addition to climate change, there is another theme left unnoticed which has to do with the coronavirus pandemic.

As mentioned previously, in the over 200 articles analysed only one piece mentioned the Covid context as significant to the story. *China Daily* quoted a member of the international NGO *Elephant Family* who spoke about the presence of wildlife due to the lack of human activity amidst the lockdown, similar to what flourished in other parts of the world during the same period.

Whether the coronavirus lockdown (which came with reduced, or controlled, human presence outside households) and the elephants trek are two related facts, is something that research has not looked into. Experts have analysed both environmental and human stressors, mainly the modifications of ecosystems due to human activities. These analyses point out that elephants are experiencing bolder behaviour by not expressing fear towards humans and being more daring in entering their landscapes. If we consider that the 2020 pandemic came with a reduced human presence on streets and land, it could be arguable that this factor further persuaded this group to adventure into appealing areas that seemed abandoned.

Certainly, the coronavirus lockdown is not a direct trigger but could be considered a secondary, contributing factor. As pointed out in an article by *China Dialogue*, land-use change (including deforestation, human settlement in primarily wildlife habitats, the growth of crop and livestock production, and urbanisation) is a globally significant driver of pandemics. It has caused the emergence of more than 30 per cent of new diseases reported since 1960 (Tianjie, 2021). The coronavirus pandemic raised alarm bells about the human health risks posed by biosystem degradation. However, no research has been found on this matter, despite being a component that should not be disregarded when trying to understand why a herd of 15 elephants decided to enter big cities when they usually would not.

7.3.3. Uniqueness in a time of rare events

The link with climate change and other human stressors as presented by the beforementioned papers is relevant because it helps understand the context in which this phenomenon took place, and compare it to the elements brought forward during its reporting. Scientific research showed how the elephants' journey was most caused synergistically by multiple stressors: the increasing food shortage caused by the species' population growth and habitat degradation

during the past decades was suddenly magnified by the hot and dry weather experienced between 2019 and 2020, triggering the astonishing northward trek (Wang et al., 2021). Meanwhile, mediatic reporting lingered on fascination and human-centred benefits – positive actions by the local task force and successful efforts by the country.

Notwithstanding differences in focus, both fields did share a common interest in the uniqueness of this case. From a historical perspective, this movement is unique because of the way it was conveyed, how it evolved in contrast to previous movements (in scale and time) and how it influenced human society, but it is (unfortunately) not rare if we consider the ecological setting surrounding it. Elephant migrations are complex ecological processes that can vary in duration, distance, timing, and driver. Groups of Asian elephants have moved away from their traditional home ranges in the past and considering their growing numbers in an increasingly reduced habitat and their knowledge of crops nearby, intelligence and sharp memory of migration routes, it is almost expectable for them to move into other areas.

The problem with this prior statement is that rare has become the “new normal”. We are living in a changing world marked by severe events and unprecedented changes, and both humans and animals are responding to this in different ways – some planned, some sudden.

These elephants responded likely due to the deteriorated and overcrowded area in which they were living, and there was a conscious, social decision to leave it (either an active decision or because she got lost, but even so the herd continued for 17 months through areas they were never seen before, thus characterizing this as a “lost animal” does not seem accurate). Just like with most species, migration should be a “normal” strategy as a form of adaptation and ultimately survival. An elephant needs a high amount of vegetation and whenever the quality and quantity of it is lacking, they have to move.

Animal movements are trivial yet this was not the case. Objectively, elephants are big and their presence is not left unnoticed. Their behaviour has an impact on the ecology (on vegetation, other species and humans), and when they travel they encounter an anthropic matrix, triggering conflicts with humans. If this had been the case of an insect or a bird, the story would not have been as significant, but with animals that have a potential impact on human life (economically, culturally, and spatially) this is different.



Figure 21: The elephant herd. [Yang Jinghao/CGTN].



Figure 20: The herd roams through a neighborhood in Shuanghe Yi Autonomous Township, Jinning District of Kunming city on June 4 [Xinhua].

Ontologically, the uniqueness of this story stems from the significance we identified in it and the questions that it raised. Experts were keen in understanding the behaviour that triggered such long-distance movement into unfamiliar areas and what consequences it held. For some time, they featured headlines, made conservation the centre of attention, and were considered individuals with agency who have a say in the matter. With their march, they stressed the need to rethink species' coexistence and find innovative conservation efforts in face of the growing effects of the ecological era we live in.

Today, after some time for analysis, research argues that the movements of the Yunnan herd are testimony to elephants' ecological and behavioural plasticity, being able to modify their behaviour in response to unexpected environmental change (Campos-Arceiz et al., 2022).

More significantly, by understanding the key drivers and underlying mechanisms causing the population expansion of Asian elephants in Yunnan we can look at this story from a bigger picture. How does the 15 elephants' story fit into the broader context of the Anthropocene?

According to the United Nations Interconnected Disaster Risks report (2022), the *wandering elephants* are part of a list of interconnected disasters that happened between 2021 and 2022, which were selected for their notoriety and representation of a larger global issue that has changed or will change lives across the world, and identifies solutions that can help to prevent or better manage them in the future. The connection with other cases – ranging from the British Columbia heatwave, the Haiti earthquake and Hurricane Ida to the vanishing vaquita – is that all of these “could have been either avoided altogether or their impacts significantly reduced if the right kind of solutions had been in place to prevent or better manage them” (UNU-EHS, 2022).

The report further elaborates on every single case and a thorough analysis of each one eventually reveals that many of the drivers of these events are formed by shared root causes, such as our economic or political systems. For instance, deforestation as a driver can be traced back to the tendency to pursue economic interests without regard for environmental externalities, a root cause defined as “undervaluing environmental costs.” Such shared root causes and drivers illustrate how seemingly disconnected disasters, like the ones identified between 2021 and 2022, link back to the same sources yet reveal themselves differently” (*idem*).

If we look at the bigger picture, global warming is reshuffling the ranges of many species around the world, leading to animals modifying their behaviours and breaking with their migratory patterns in the search of cooler climes (Carrington, 2017). For example, the red fox, the arctic fox and Edith’s butterfly, have been forced to shift their range, venturing into regions of higher elevation and/ or higher latitudes, confronting new environmental challenges in response to the effects of global warming or habit conversion (Zhao et al., 2018). And also in China did humans spot a herd of red deer on snow-covered slopes, more than 30 blue sheep, and a snow leopard in Dulan County in northwest China's Qinghai Province (CGTN, 2022 October), this latter being the first time for the species to be so far east.

Whether these cases are also related to global warming is to be confirmed. What is already certain is that climate change is causing the geographical redistribution of plant and animal species globally. These distributional shifts are leading to new ecosystems and ecological communities, changes that will also ultimately affect human societies (Pecl et al., 2017).

The long-distance dispersal by the Kunming herd is a reminder that climate change will disrupt traditional ecological dynamics and will exacerbate exceptional events around the globe. This is more significant considering that this species’ movements and many others are compromised in the Anthropocene. Acknowledging their place in the unfolding contemporary narrative is important to both place other-than-human species in a time of climate-change-induced effects and take concrete and effective measures for better management and conservation.

For the Asian elephant, this is even more significant because due to their size and survival requirements, they have a more obvious impact; an impact that needs to be carefully calibrated to understand its compatibility with the Anthroposphere: How much ecological space do they

need and how agreeable is that with the human and man-made structures pressing, surrounding, defining it.

As one netizen expressed on the Chinese social media site *Weibo*: “The reality is human activities are becoming more extensive, more wildlife areas are becoming urbanized, and even the so-called nature reserves are increasingly becoming like urban parks. More than any other time in history, we are emphasising ecological conservation, but the reality is still brutal” (Campbell, 2021).

7.4. The aftermath

According to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration (NFGA), the elephants eventually returned to their original habitat and still remain in the nature reserve in a good state. Learning from this experience, the NFGA also said that the conservation work related to the Asian elephant focuses not only on monitoring and early warning but also takes comprehensive measures to solve problems, such as protecting its habitats and solving human-elephant conflicts in the long term (Jinghao & Caiwen, 2022).

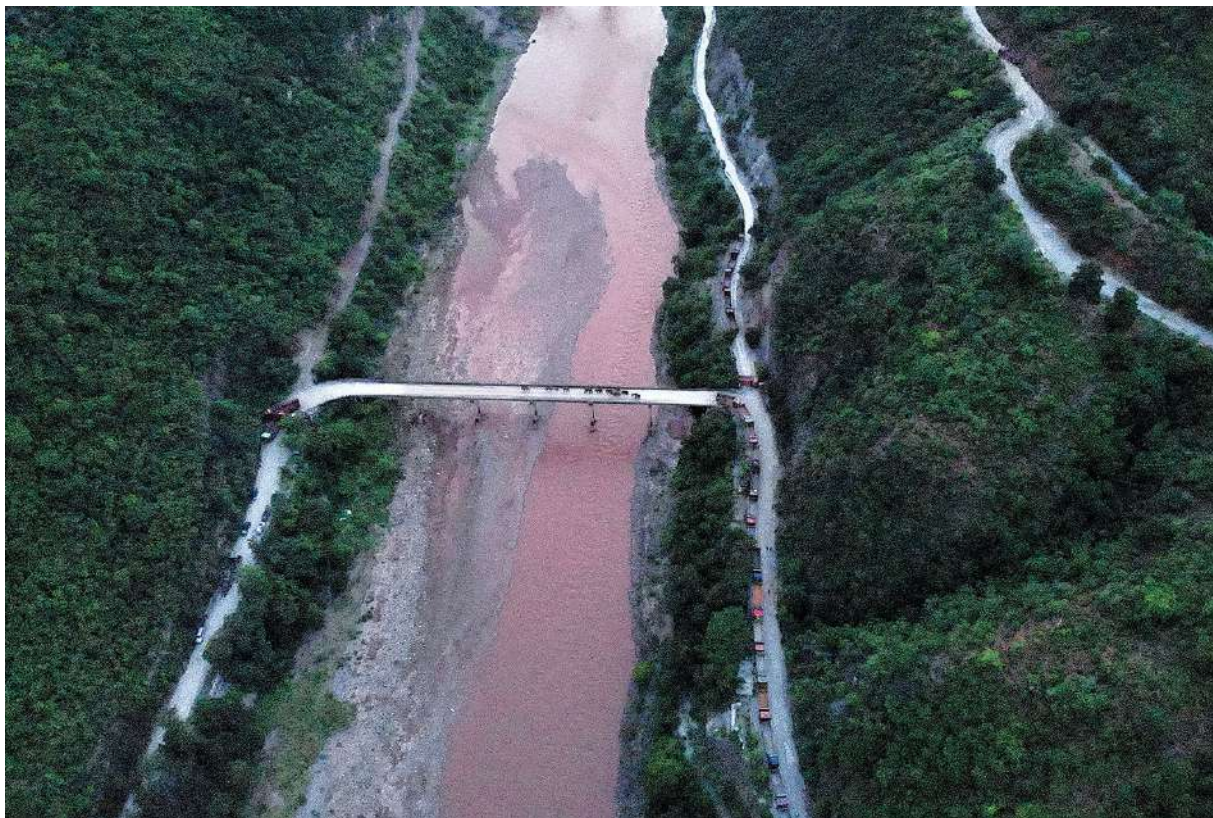


Figure 22: Roaming elephants are guided across the Yuanjiang Bridge, Yunnan province, on Aug 8.[Photo/China Daily].

Following this note, there are significant outcomes, one indirectly tied and others stemming from it, that prove the significance of this event beyond the migration in itself.

7.4.1. Light on the ecological civilisation

During President Xi Jinping's speech at COP15, the concept of "ecological civilisation" made a debut as the country's guide to coordinating the relationship between man and nature. Although this was already used in China in the 1980s as an academic concept, in 2018 Xi Jinping inserted *ecological civilisation* into the party charter, thus reappearing in media as the country's vision of a greener future and its progress – whose legitimacy has been scrutinized by foreign eyes–, was justified in 2021 by how the *wandering elephants* were dealt with. "China has made remarkable progress in building an *ecological civilisation*. The recent story of the northward travel and return of a group of elephants in Yunnan province in southwestern China shows the vivid results of our endeavour to protect wild animals" (2021).

The fact that the UN Summit on Biodiversity in Kunming was happening at the same time is quite timely. According to experts, the odyssey of the herd in Yunnan and the measures and attitudes taken by Chinese wildlife conservationists are "a perfect footnote to China's growing environmental awareness and harmonious coexistence between humans and animals, as the story reflects the way China is taking action to build a community of life together" (Liuliu, Hui & Fandi, 2021).

From an emotional stance, the successful handling of the 15 elephants allowed China to revive a latent project and reintroduce—to push for—ideas concerning the "harmonious coexistence of Man and Nature". These have a strong appeal in the country as it is consistent with ancient Chinese Taoist philosophy, upholding views on the unity of man and nature: "it advocates for the intrinsic value of nature, upholding the belief that humanity is a component of nature, and promoting respect for nature and the need to conform to the rule of nature" (Ma et al., 2021). The *ecological civilisation* approach is more than just a pragmatic reliance on ecosystem service values and instead places inherent value on nature (Wei et al., 2021).

The story of the *wandering elephants* is not only the means to endorse an ancient philosophy but it has the potential to translate its values into today's society. It places values of care and understanding in human contemporary mentality and aims to break away from human-animal divides and instead move towards a sustainable coexistence – a future that equally respects and understands all species' needs.

Now, by embodying these new (old) values and placing them into real political, social and economic efforts there is room for tangible change. The reappearance of the *ecological civilisation* came with the announcement of China's initiative to establish a Kunming

Biodiversity Fund and take the lead by investing 1.5 billion yuan to support biodiversity protection in developing countries. He also announced a new national park scheme that would bring a land area of 230,000 square km under stronger state protection. The parks – which cover the habitat of protected species as well as key nature reserves near the headwaters of the Yangtze, Yellow and Mekong rivers in the northwest – are home to nearly 30 per cent of the key terrestrial wildlife species found in the country (Stanway, 2021).

With the herd’s movement, conservationists are trying to leverage greater public awareness and worldwide attention to ensure that real change can come from the elephants’ plight. As stated in an editorial piece in *China Daily* (June, 2021): “China should accord priority to the protection of wildlife, including large mammals such as elephants, as part of its national policy of building an ecological civilisation”.

UNITED NATIONS INTERCONNECTED DISASTER RISKS REPORT (2021):
<p>The UN Interconnected Disaster Risks Report proposes an interesting solution package that, if implemented, could lead to long-lasting, sustainable solutions ensuring human-animal coexistence (2021):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Improve habitat suitability: The report suggests that human-wildlife encounters can be reduced by improving ecosystem health, expanding natural areas, connecting protected areas and designing spaces for coexistence. They underline that these measures can deliver important co-benefits, from carbon sequestration and reduction of land degradation to local employment.• Holistic conservation: If we wish to defuse human-wildlife conflicts, conservation plans must address the needs of both biodiversity and local communities. For instance, integrating traditional farming into protected natural areas (e.g. in buffer and transition zones) can make elephant habitats larger and safer from confrontation with humans while also meeting villagers' needs and managing land sustainably. This requires an approach that aims for coexistence rather than isolation.• Natural barriers: Rather than artificial fences, the report proposes using natural elements such as beehive fences and deterring crops as a prevention measure to avoid human-wildlife confrontation. Not only that, but it would also support and

diversify livelihoods, as well as improve food security. For this solution to succeed, environmental education of farmers, technical assistance and transparent compensation schemes are key.

7.4.2. Conservation lessons from the elephants' behaviour

The story of the Yunnan herd has the potential to open a new chapter in biodiversity history; one that focuses on changed patterns, new environments, adaptation and movements and, most importantly, co-existence among all species. Even if it was story reported from a specific perspective and prioritised given topics over others, it sparked discussions on the protection of wild animals in a comprehensive way and has the strength to move towards the right direction, doing more good than wrong.

There are important conservation lessons to learn from the movements of the herd. First, they evidenced that the current conservation management approach towards elephant habitats needs reworking. In a multi-sector and multi-stakeholder exercise by Chen et al. (2021), researchers presented that it was unlikely that elephants in China would undergo actual migrations and that no GPS-telemetry studies had so far provided evidence of migratory behaviour in Asian elephants. The *wandering elephants*, although not all experts agree that it was a migration, showed otherwise. As it is today, the elephant range in China and the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reservoir specifically (the PA with the highest number of elephants in China) is highly fragmented. Many elephants roam outside rather than inside the PA borders.

True is that the expansion of Protected Areas in China in recent years has done much to safekeeping biodiversity and ensure the survival of endangered species. There has been a steady and continuous increase in the areas of protected forests and the fractions of species protected with them. Nonetheless, these reserves protected species with small geographical ranges better than those with larger ones. As researchers Binbin V. Li and Stuart L. Pimm point out (2020), "China's future reserve expansion must consider where to protect biodiversity, not just how much area to protect".

Therefore, key fundamental studies about Chinese elephants should focus on their changing, ranging behaviour and use of space. **Conservation efforts should explore the PAs connectivity instead of segregation and integrate movement ecology, especially for large**

mammals, in conservation planning. Because, as the Yunnan herd showed, in case of severe environmental change elephants can respond by altering their behaviour and movement patterns.

The march northwards proved the necessity of **building an Asian elephant national park**, something that had already been proposed but the *wandering elephants* attracted the much-needed public attention on this matter. Now China should embrace the recent reorganisation of the management of protected areas in the country to continue the progress of making protected areas more representative of biodiversity, encouraging it to do more of the same (Li & Pimm, 2020). For example, the corridors suggested by Zhang et al. (2015), linking the ranges of populations in the north and the south of Xishuangbana, respectively, could be the starting point.

Secondly, the herd has evidenced the urgency at hand and the need to **incorporate a fundamental awareness of ongoing rapid climatic change in all levels of conservation planning and policy.** Considering the trend of both climate change and human activities will continue to increase globally, including in Yunnan (IPCC, 2001), it is highly needed to take more effective measures to conserve Asian elephants and protect the property and lives of local people who will be most affected by the impacts of global warming. Protected Areas are no stranger to these effects. While the boundaries of PAs are generally fixed, the biological landscape, driven by climate change, is no longer static, or as stable as it has been in the recent past (Lovejoy, 2006). In the future, the existing PAs that are now overlaid on these current shifting biological landscapes, may not be bioclimatically appropriate or capable to continue protecting the species and ecosystems that they were originally intended to conserve (Zomer et al., 2015). Furthermore, if nature reserves, the most strictly protected PAs for biodiversity conservation, are showing signs of diminished quality, it puts other areas without protection in a worrisome state.

The 15 elephants served as an example of the cascade effect such a disruption can have. Migration, dispersal and displacement are the responses to a changing world, and this is true for both humans and other-than-human animals alike. This poses a great conservation challenge: animals are shifting from a resident strategy to a migrating one or viceversa, and biotic communities are changing with several consequences. The relocation of elephants is not just a matter of space; it could lead to a cascade effect. As an essential part of an ecosystem, elephant droppings are vast storerooms of nutrients for other animals. The excrement is rich

in plant fibre seeds and various organic nutrients, which some smaller animals in Xishuangbanna's rainforests such as birds and frogs depend on (Yuqiao, Xi & Yuche, 2021). Taking that out of the chain can open up other unforeseen problems.

Thirdly, the Yunnan herd has shown how a more **inclusive conservation approach can contribute to ameliorating human-elephant conflict and enhancing coexistence**. According to the research of Lu et al., 2020, there is a perception that local communities have little sense of ownership and agency when it comes to human-elephant conflict mitigation. For instance, “the strong legal protection conferred on elephants has led local communities to feel disempowered and perceive this mitigation as the government’s responsibility”.

The *wandering elephants* have shone a light on a different conservation approach, perhaps one that we need: conservation strategies framed around people’s aspirations and values to promote more diverse relations between human and nonhuman nature, and more equal recognition of the plural values of nature (Pascual et al., 2021). Instead of a top-down approach, have communities involved, motivating them to participate in human-elephant mitigation and making these feel part of the result. Further research should embrace the fascination the herd caused to build more tolerance by engaging people in the process.

China's interest in Asian elephant conservation and the experiences drawn from this case could **also benefit practitioners from elsewhere**. The gentle approach taken by Chinese authorities towards the migrating elephants were considered applaudable and can be learnt by other countries where elephants inhabit.

Usually, when it comes to human-elephant conflict mitigation, discussions throughout Asia generally focus on protecting people’s interests rather than animals (Chen et al., 2021). With the Yunnan herd equal attention was given to both human and animal protection, leading to positive results coupled with innovative solutions that could be of use to other similar scenarios happening in the country, Europe and North America. Plus, as seen in China’s case, the international recognition and praise showed that elephant conservation serves the nation’s interests, and successful, soft power conservation approaches can enhance a country’s global reputation (Li, 2021).

Ultimately, the persistence of including climate change in the narrative is important for many reasons. Climate change should not be viewed as a cause-effect relationship but rather as a conjuncture of phenomena that will continue to display in the longer term. The *wandering elephants* were an example of how we live in a fast-changing world that is increasingly affecting

wild animals at individual, population and community levels, and a deep understanding of both cumulative and synergistic effects of these changes is a priority to understand their possible consequences. Moreover, the simple fact of including animals – more-than-human species – as part of these changes, as part of the movements and migrations, acknowledging them as also victims of these effects, is key in helping and harmonizing the co-existence between species.

8. Conclusion

“If we needed more proof of our biodiversity crisis, a herd of wild elephants marching through China has been doing the job in the most heart-warming way possible.”

China Dialogue – ENRIC SALA, NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC EXPLORER IN RESIDENCE AND ECOLOGIST. JULY 21, 2021

We live in a world with a continuous flow of information and it is not always easy to make key messages, significant stories, cut through the noise. But whenever that happens, it is important to hold on to it as much as one can to make sure that those realities are not only told but also, and most importantly, heard.

The reason why this paper chose to focus on mass media is because media has a powerful effect on the worldview of society. “The entire study of mass communication is based on the premise that the media have significant effects” as they frame “images of reality in a predictable and patterned way” (McQuail, 1994).

The journey of the 15 elephants was one of those events that would have gone unnoticed if it wasn’t because of its particularity. Throughout history, we have seen how human interactions with wildlife are a defining experience of human existence. Negative interactions in the past have led to the extinction and reduction of numerous species; while positive interactions have carried important advances in our understanding and relationship with others (Nyhus, 2016). The herd in Yunnan could have been archived as another animal *migration* or a fairy-like tale told from China to the world – just another trivial case of animals wandering off and beyond their boundaries. This was not the case.

As a high-profile case of unusual behaviour by a charismatic, endangered, and potentially dangerous animal species, the mediatic attention and editorial preference pushed this event to fill headlines all over the world. For some time, they were the protagonists of their story who

were acknowledged as a character and given agency. That kind of attribution has weight in a history that is only being narrated from an anthropocentric perspective.

Other-than-human animals rarely have a say in how the world is defined or even a line in the play that is humankind's history. Between 2020 and 2021 the tables turned. The world revolved around the *wandering elephants* and they had the world listening to what they were not saying with their actions. Gradually, their story unravelled and it became clear that a herd of wild elephants walking through Yunnan was not only an engaging tale but a powerful symbol of the urgency that is forcing our nature crisis onto the agenda of global leaders.

The analysis of how people spoke and wrote about the 15 elephants is interesting because, by observing the verbal construction of humans, we can decipher the ecolinguistic significance of this event beyond the migration in itself and gain an insight into the conception of the world held by the (human) speaker or writer. Thus, the language of the journalists who presented the elephants as carefree wanderers as well as carriers of important conservation messages may also tell us much about the journalists themselves and the newspapers they work for.

The representation that filled media articles and broadcasts revealed, once again, a power imbalance: It is the powerful that had the chance to represent and give (or not) voice to those represented in their discourse practices.

To illustrate this point, this paper examined all the news articles published in China by the three English-speaking media outlets *CGTN*, *China Daily* and *Global Times* between January 2020 and December 2021. Because it was a local story, this allowed for editorial ownership: it was China's story to tell. Yet, one must consider the fact that these outlets are owned and under the control of the Chinese Communist Party, and as the English voice of China they are supposed to promote China's concerns and needs in the international community.

The event was framed as a story of human success rather than failure, and as an example of positive conservation efforts and increased multispecies tolerance. Such a portrayal is not overall incorrect. Many international organisations hailed China's handling of these elephants and thanks to the attention they drew, several discussions opened on how to take better care of this endangered species and ensure both the animal and humans' safety along the way.

With the reporting of the elephants' migration, came a moment of attention and reappraisal of what it means to live with other-than-human species, especially in a

geological context defined by human actions. However, as stated in an article from *China Dialogue* (2021), “positive numbers never tell the whole story”.

There was a tendency to emphasise how the number of species had increased in the last couple of years, which was later used as the argument to justify their departure. As there were more elephants, they had to leave because their habitat became small; yet little contextual reference was made to why the magnitude of their habitat had decreased. In addition, this event provided an opportunity for redemption. Overshadowed by climate issues, China’s biodiversity governance rarely rises to global attention but the tale of the 15 elephants was a chance to tell a positive story of biodiversity conservation at home. It created mediatic space to draw attention to ambitious conservation efforts and allowed to show progress in the nation’s aspiration to achieve an *ecological civilisation* and to announce ambitious conservation projects, like the Kunming Biodiversity Fund or a new national park scheme in the country.

All of these announcements together with COP15 happening at the time are great opportunities to raise public awareness and shore up support for conservation reforms. The bizarre travels of the 15 elephants helped pique further interest or even make a perfect pitch in international forums on biodiversity. As a follow-up, a healthy discussion would want to look into why this happened, and how encroachment, fragmentation and climate change influenced it. “Yet such sobering expert opinion was somewhat drowned out by portrayals of a cheerful success story about elephant numbers recovering” (Guo, 2021).

The scientific backing to explain why this herd left was probably not ready at the time. Regardless of this, there were conscious language choices that steered the discussion in other directions. Just like it was important to underline the impressive actions taken by local authorities, it is equally important not to misinterpret the story, reducing it to a lost leader or a capacity issue.

The vague attribution by *TIME Magazine* of these elephants being potential “climate change migrants” is not meaningless. Despite mounting evidence of global species redistribution driven by human-mediated changing climate, current global goals, policies, and international agreements do not sufficiently consider species range shifts in their formulation of targets or even in most mitigation and adaptation strategies, including the United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goals (Pecl et al., 2017). This matters because climate-driven species redistribution at regional to global scales affects not only ecosystem functioning but also human well-being and the dynamics of climate change itself. Acknowledging the multispecies

aspect of climate change migration and attributing it as such in our discourse practices could trigger systemic change.

After some time for digestion, experts are urging the public to temper its delight with awareness of the ecological significance of this case. As stated by Becky Shu Chen, a consultant for the Zoological Society of London, “the best-case outcome would be for the attention that the herd has drawn to raise more awareness around the possibility of human-elephant conflict” (Wang 2021); and to this, we would add more attention to the challenges that will arise from global redistribution of species worldwide.

Even if not fully embraced at the time, this unusual, well-documented, and high-profile elephant behaviour has the potential to open a new chapter in biodiversity history. It presents an opportunity to rethink the human-nature relationship by, for instance, re-framing biodiversity from a passive entity needing to be saved by humans to an active player in the history of ecology. The herd did have an important “conservation message for the world” and as a highly cognitive animal, their behaviour should not be cased as trivial. Moreover, while a mammal as giant as an elephant might be capable of making its existential crisis known and sounding alarms as soon as they cross an anthropic matrix, many other smaller species may simply disappear.

As a result of this event, scientific research on the subject has come up with revealing findings and recommendations to ensure the species’ protection, such as expanding the existing protected areas or setting up new ones in Yunnan’s north and east to deal with the expected range expansion of the Asian elephant population (Bai et al., 2022). These ideas put into evidence the need to rethink our conservation approaches. According to a discussion paper by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (2020), “today’s conservation initiatives must combine societal transformations of the social and ecological relations, technologies, and institutions that bind local places to global networks, with personal transformations of people’s values, identity, and behaviour”.

The Elephants in the Room rests on the conclusion that the story of the *wandering elephants* turned into human’s favour but with important silver linings. As an example of environmental communication, the coverage of this movement placed the need for better care and attention to coexistence on top of the agenda. One of the main outcomes is that rather than recognising these animals as climate change migrants *per se*, these elephants opened a discussion: it prompted us to rethink the relationship between humans and non-humans and

urged us to try to find new ways of coexistence in an increasingly changing world. The *wandering elephants* constitute a *story to live by* because even though it was used to heighten human efforts, it created space for reflection. As points to deeper environmental problems, they forced us to rethink how we view our presence and our relationship with ecology and exposed that the cost of not putting biodiversity, and climate change, at the heart of development policies is much, much higher. Furthermore, they are a beautiful example of how we need more evocative stories that inspire hope and capture people's minds, stories that can serve as the means to spur action from authorities and among the general public.

As such, how we achieve a long-lasting harmonious coexistence with elephants in the context of global climate changes will remain an important scientific issue for the foreseeable future. Thus, further research should explore how to protect endangered species in a more scientific and pragmatic way. If China wants to achieve its vision to build an *ecological civilisation* where both humans and other-than-human animals coexist in harmony, it will need to start to address, and listen to, the elephant(s) in its conservation management approach.



Figure 23: The elephant herd wanders on a mountain ridge, looking for food, in Yuxi, Yunnan province, on Sunday. [Photo by Zhou Xin/for China Daily].

9. Annex

CGTN

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
March 19, 2020 (09.18)	News release from Xinhua	“Wild elephants”	Sentence level foregrounding elephants yet attention switches to residents.	Elephants seem to have agency, deciding their fate and not being delimited/guided yet by humans.	Modal verb of possibility to indicate reason of departure (“may be a reason”).	N/A	N/A
April 25, 2020 (07.26)	News article	N/A	N/A	Agency is owned by elephants themselves who adapt and respond to their environment	Herd’s trek presented as seemingly isolated event, yet does hint to changing weather patterns that force animals to look someplace else (unclear).	Event presented as a consequence of a longer pattern, spread through time: “continuous dry weather”.	N/A
April 27, 2020 (16.53)	Update previous piece	N/A	N/A	Elephants are the elements observed rather than the subjects observing themselves: “elephants seen”.	N/A	Update previous piece	N/A
May 12, 2020 (11.11)	News article	“The carefree life of wild Asian elephants”.	Elephants owning their own ‘lifestyle’.	Humanizing the animals: they have similar needs to humans (relax, drink, eat...).	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 22, 2020 (14.07)	News article	N/A	Chinese villages and their response to elephants’ presence.	N/A	Mentions increase of animals’ presence in villages yet no mention of reason behind it.	N/A	N/A
October 30, 2020 (14.49)	News article	“Elephants trespassers”	As headline suggests (“Elephant trespassers: Angels or beasts?”), the animals are foregrounded but clearly from a human point of view.	N/A	The elephants’ habitat “has been squeezed” yet omission of agent of power. Who has squeezed it?	N/A	Balance between negative (need to mitigate tension) and positive (admiration for the species).
May 13, 2021 (21.29)	News article	N/A	Pu'er rangers to lead and deal with the situation.	Human-focused, human-led actions.	N/A	N/A	Positive appreciation for human tasks.
May 28, 2021 (14.39)	Video	N/A	Evacuation of residents	(Humans) evacuated by (human) taskforce.	N/A	N/A	Catastrophic oriented.
May 29, 2021 (08.33)	TV live-stream	“Elephants’ exploration”	N/A	Elephants are rambling (implies	N/A	N/A	N/A

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
				pleasure, free of concern?)			
May 30, 2021 (12.11)	News release from Xinhua	N/A	Focus on what the authorities are doing (trying to avoid herd going further north).	Agency to humans (not animals): elephants <u>were found</u> by...	"rare event"	N/A	N/A
May 30, 2021 (14.30)	TV live-stream	"family vocation"	N/A	Elephants "break in" implying unwelcome arrival, not their place to be.	Uncertainty by raising questions left unanswered.	N/A	Alarming tone towards populated areas where herd is heading.
May 30, 2021 (19.09)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	Elephants wandering in human settlements.	N/A	N/A	N/A
May 31, 2021 (13.05)	TV live-stream	<u>Yunnan's</u> Migrating Elephants	N/A	Elephants are the cause of human reactions.	Experts "guess" that the leader got lost.	N/A	Alarming tone (evacuation).
May 31, 2021 (16.48)	News article & video	"Wild Elephant Crisis"	N/A	Breaking in, trampling... aggressive actions causing harm on humans (victimizing humans?)	N/A	N/A	Labelling the event as a "crisis".
May 31, 2021 (19.08)	News article	"Eye-catching journey" "Yunnan elephants"	N/A	Agency to the herd who continues and owns their actions.	Experts are "puzzled" to why this is happening. Use of modal verbs of possibility: "We <u>may</u> never find out why they have left..."	Described as "first time in history" event. The mystery aspect as a reason for continuity: "this is not over".	N/A
June 1, 2021 (10.22)	News article	N/A	N/A	Measures taken for elephants to respond to.	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 1, 2021 (15.24)	News article	N/A	Headline leads with elephants but article foregrounds taskforce and its actions.	N/A	Expert voice to give more certainty on the cause.	Possibility of a longer-lasting consequence: change of food habits. "This is a long-term concern".	N/A
June 1, 2021 (19.50)	News article & video	N/A	A real human story (local voices, expert guidance, authority's reassurance, international concern...).	N/A	Headline with uncertainty: "Herd of elephants' mystery 400 km hike continues in China" The " <u>suggestion</u> " is that looking for	N/A	N/A

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
					food <u>might</u> be the reason.		
June 1, 2021 (16.07)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	Elephants continue <u>their</u> trek	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 2, 2021 (08.37)	TV live-stream	N/A	Asian elephants > human task force	N/A	N/A	Present actions to influence future (approaching Kunming)	N/A
June 2, 2021 (09.25)	Detailed timeline	"The wandering elephants", "China's famous herd"	N/A	Elephants grouped into a poetic entity of "wandering herd" who doesn't directly show or do, but passively acts ("has shown trends").	Suspicion and mystery on what were the triggers, no clear answers.	N/A	N/A
June 3, 2021 (04.51)	TV live-stream	N/A	Local government > elephants.	Local government gives actions and does receiving it are local residents. What about the elephants?	N/A	N/A	Tension, alert for elephants' arrival.
June 3, 2021 (06.32)	TV live-stream	N/A	Elephants > humans	Agent of damage and chaos (to justify human intervention?)	N/A	Continuity, following each single step of the herd.	Negativity takes over: elephants causing damage (headline)
June 3, 2021 (09.07)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Continuity, follow-up piece on location	N/A
June 3, 2021 (12.27)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Continuity, follow-up piece on location	N/A
June 3, 2021 (19.15)	News article	"Mysterious marching elephants"	N/A	N/A	Seems mystery element is the clickbait of the story: "leaves experts puzzled", "no one knows why". Gives uniqueness?	N/A	Fascination, appraisal. The elephants featured among the most significant stories of the week.
June 4, 2021 (09.32)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	The elephants respond to what humans prepare but the whole world stops for their passing.	N/A	Continuity, explaining every day new step ("6 km from where we were yesterday")	N/A
June 4, 2021 (15.07)	TV live-stream	N/A	China's protection efforts is what matters here.	N/A	Growth of elephant numbers is likely what led to this situation and hints to need of more land but	N/A	Positivity towards human actions.

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
					unclear to whose expense.		
June 4, 2021 (16.58)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Continuity, follow-up piece on location	N/A
June 5, 2021 (06.03)	Social media post	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 6, 2021 (11.00)	News article	N/A	N/A	Human reactions and damage caused to humans. The elephant story is being told and framed from a human perspective.	N/A	N/A	Damage focused
June 6, 2021 (12.49)	TV interview	N/A	N/A	N/A	No food north but seems they are headed there. If not for food, for what?	N/A	N/A
June 6, 2021 (14.22)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	Authorities first, they are given agency, while the elephants are passively guided.	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 7, 2021 (07.41)	Detailed timeline	N/A	N/A	N/A	First time the concept of barriers is introduced but no specifics on how these look like nor where and when will they be built, if so.	N/A	N/A
June 7, 2021 (10.58)	Interview	“international superstars”	N/A	Weirdly an interview with an elephant but it is a human impersonating it.	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 7, 2021 (11.30)	News piece & video	N/A	N/A	N/A	Element of unpredictability	N/A	N/A
June 7, 2021 (13.56)	Timeline and graphic data on the migration	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 7, 2021 (16.09)	Interviews	“The wandering elephants” (unique, no other)	Human opinion is what matters.	Interactions and dialogue. Herd ignited heated debate online, with people arguing about the moral and legal boundaries of protecting animal lives versus defending human territory.	N/A	N/A	Calibrated balance between fear and admiration-respect

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
June 7, 2021 (16.13)	News article	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 7, 2021 (17.17)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	Important to underline media's presence, the narrating voice is on site (human).	N/A	The longest elephant journey in China's history.	N/A
June 8, 2021 (06.42)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	They have been found by humans	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 8, 2021 (10.49)	News article	N/A	N/A	Ironically, the good actions of humans (increase of their protection and consequent growth in breeding) is the reason of this trek, of them "dispersing"	Emphasis on int. coverage and their unresolved attempt to analyse the possible reasons.	N/A	Cause for celebration?
June 8, 2021 (14.21)	TV show A magic cube	"Missing elephants", "monsters"	N/A	Storytelling from different human perspectives (TV channels): a children's show, a legal perspective, science and education channel, food channel...	N/A	Longest ever-made elephants migration in China throughout history, at least the recorded one.	N/A
June 8, 2021 (16.37)	TV live-stream	"Epic journey"	N/A	They (elephants) are "on a mission", implying there is a goal to reach. Opposed perceptions: international praise vs. local displeasure due to damage.	"unusual", "unknown"	N/A	N/A
June 8, 2021 (17.04)	Drone footage	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 8, 2021 (21.50)	Social media post	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Continuity	N/A
June 9, 2021 (10.46)	TV show Headline Buster	"Intrepid travellers", "unusual emergency", "journey of gentle giants" Makes sure to underline that these elephants are Chinese and that this is a	Advocating the right story and respond to inaccuracies and the dangers to romanticise it.	Elephants directly cause damage yet indirectly are escorted. Humans are the ones to pick up the pieces. Yet also human/emotional factor. "Elephants have united people around the world, raising important tasks on how can	Raises important questions to understand what the story is about: -How is int. media reporting on local efforts? -Why has the story captivated so many? -What does it all say about the important relationship between	N/A	"A beautiful story with important, serious connotations" Instead of accusatory pieces, int. media have covered this event more "fairly": "It is a story hard to twist", "a

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
		Chinese story.		we coexist peacefully”	humans and wildlife?		story to get the record straight”
June 9, 2021 (17.10)	News article	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 9, 2021 (17.47)	TV live-stream	“China’s wandering elephants”	The world (humans) foregrounded before elephants	The world has fallen in love with these elephants: idolizing?	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 10, 2021 (06.57)	News article	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 10, 2021 (07.08)	TV interview	“Epic journey”, “gentle giants”	N/A	N/A	Amount of tolerance received is surprising, what does that say about human-animal relationship so far?	Continuity	Worldwide appreciation and widespread attention
June 10, 2021 (14.37)	News article	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 10, 2021 (15.06)	News article	N/A	N/A	Marching elephants in Yunnan trigger debate over global conservation policies, they open the conversation.	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 11, 2021 (04.06)	News article	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 11, 2021 (08.54)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 11, 2021 (16.41)	TV snippet	N/A	N/A	Asian elephants that has attracted international attention	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 11, 2021 (16.47)	TV interview with experts	“Uncommon movement”	N/A	Movement herd = warning to slow down and pay more attention to taking care of our environment.	Underlying, unanswered question: What do we value the most? Human lives? Protection environment?	Long term solution depending on changes on human actions, behaviours.	N/A
June 12, 2021 (12.18)	TV live-stream	“Wandering journey”	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 12, 2021 (14.20)	TV live-stream	“Headline-grabbing migration”	N/A	N/A	N/A	Continuity	N/A

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
June 12, 2021 (16.59)	TV show Tech it out	N/A	N/A	N/A	Reasons behind the migration, climate change first time to be considered, yet no link whatsoever, not followed up.	Consequence of a larger crosscutting problem (last 10-years).	N/A
June 13, 2021 (04.37)	News article	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 13, 2021 (11.59)	News article	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 14, 2021 (10.19)	TV interview	“China Wandering Elephants”	Authorities stepping up efforts > elephants	Elephants are passively lured back by what local authorities are doing.	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 14, 2021 (12.32)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 15, 2021 (11.43)	News article	“Epic adventure”	“The human story”	N/A	Speculation on the causes.	N/A	Positive unexpected outcomes: It has raised curiosity and Awareness.
June 16, 2021 (10.10)	News article & video	N/A	Elephant chasers are foregrounded	Anthropomorphisation elephants with human-like attributes.	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 16, 2021 (14.03)	TV Show Hold your horses	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Affection towards other-than-human species
June 18, 2021 (06.03)	News article	“Rambling elephants”	N/A	Seen by humans, observers vs. observed.	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 18, 2021 (18.03)	TV interview	“China’s beloved elephants”	N/A	Humanizing elephants as them having their own consciousness.	Besides mystery, intrigue comes into the picture: elephants heading back to ancestral location.	Connection with the historic past: “The elephants are heading back in the direction they used to live 1,500 years ago”.	N/A
June 19, 2021 (09.11)	News article	N/A	N/A	Humanizing elephants by praising their “astute skills”.	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 20, 2021 (10.58)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
June 22, 2021 (05.21)	News article	“China’s migrating elephant herd”	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 23, 2021 (10.00)	TV interview		Environmental protection efforts are the focus.				Positive perceptions, appraisal of China’s efforts
June 25, 2021 (09.52)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 27, 2021 (11.12)	Yang Jinghao	“wandering elephants”	N/A	The herd is the one showing trend of returning, they are still deciding their fate. The “how” is up to humans,	N/A	Update whereabouts (beginning of the end)	N/A
June 28, 2021 (04.41)	News release Xinhua	“China’s migrating elephants”	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 28, 2021 (10.20)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
July 4, 2021 (06.16)	TV Show	“Elephants’ adventure” (a bit romanticised)	N/A	As the title suggests (“A meaningful dialogue between humans and nature”), this story has had the potential to better and strengthen human-animal relationship.	N/A	Focus on future reflections and conversations (what will happen after): “Prompted people to envisage better ways to live in harmony with nature”	N/A
July 6, 2021 (19.10)	TV Show (Razor)	“The mystery of China’s wandering elephants”	N/A	Emotional bond between humans and animals = potential to shift/change relationships, perceptions, actions Triggerword: Elephants are not migrating but rather <u>dispersing</u>	The mystery is what triggers attention	N/A	N/A
July 9, 2021 (04.36)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
July 13, 2021 (03.35)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
July 16, 2021 (06.17)	News article	“Journeying jumbos”	Elephant and their damage	Their actions are the centre of attention, actions that are found by others.	N/A	N/A	N/A

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
July 17, 2021 (16.52)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
July 20, 2021 (12.31)	TV live-stream	“China’s wandering elephants”	N/A	Proposed to think how human activity has driven them to make this journey.	N/A	N/A	N/A
July 28, 2021 (11.21)	News article.	“Unusual march”, “a rare trek”, “tour group”	China’s efforts is the focus in this story, both the trigger and the concluding observation.	Following the topicalization, we question whether it ever was an animal story and not just a human-centred one.	N/A	N/A	N/A
July 31, 2021 (14.08)	TV live-stream	“Elephants on a mission”.	Elephants are foregrounded but it is actually more about the unique (human) actions and responses.	N/A	N/A	“Unprecedented trek” across history.	Unique, fascination, learning opportunity.
August 8, 2021 (06.02)	TV live-stream	“Famous herd”	N/A	N/A	N/A	Return home	N/A
August 8, 2021 (15.11)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Return home	N/A
August 9, 2021 (09.21)	Travel log	“The famous wandering elephants”	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts & actions	N/A
August 9, 2021 (13.12)	TV live-stream	“China’s wandering elephants”	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
August 10, 2021 (11.50)	Interview	“China’s wandering elephants”	N/A	N/A	N/A	Eye on next step: “...the focus next should be the recovery and transformation of this habitat”	“We can call this a decisive victory” = celebration
August 10, 2021 (12.04)	News editorial by Wu Changhua (Professional Association for China’s Environment)	“China’s famous herd”	The outcomes is what matters here.	Elephants have done the first step of opening the conversation, who is going to lead it now? In a way, take responsibility	Rather than the obvious it is more about what is left unsaid, the reflections they have raised in silence Mentions climate change as a potential cause, but not further context.	The need to keep the story alive, need for continuity: “Need to further demystify the root causes of the elephants’ migration”. “The story shall be kept alive for the sake of awakening decision-makers”.	Promising outcomes
August 10, 2021 (19.01)	News release Reuters	N/A	N/A	Elephants are “being guided”	“likely” to happen again.	N/A	N/A

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
August 14, 2021 (11.44)	TV live - stream	“China’s herd”	N/A	N/A	N/A	Conclusion of 17-months journey.	N/A
August 23, 2021 (12.07)	TV Show (Razor)	“A record-breaking group of Chinese elephants”	Human actions	Task force efforts leading elephants home.	N/A	All about the outcomes, the future.	N/A
September 3, 2021 (13.21)	News article	“unusual journey”	N/A	N/A	Official listing of potential caused yet not guarantee, cause remains a “mystery”.	N/A	N/A
September 10, 2021 (03.38)	News snippet	“China’s wandering elephants”	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts.	N/A
October 11, 2021 (09.51)	News article	“China’s wandering elephants”	N/A	N/A	N/A	Connection with other broader protection trends and nation’s action on biodiversity, especially ahead of COP15.	Appreciation, appraisal.
December 29, 2021 (07.31)	News article	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	How it connects to the bigger picture (spatially and temporally).	Fascination: attention and significance beyond the mere movement.
December 31, 2021 (10.15)	News editorial	“China’s migrating elephants”	Human actions, task force	N/A	N/A	Observing the past, still influencing the present.	N/A
January 1, 2022 (14.20)	TV live-stream	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
May 26, 2022 (12.47)	News article	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Follow-up story on what happened with the elephants.	N/A
August 12, 2022 (12.28)	Interview	“Wandering elephants of Yunnan”.	“Guardians” (the monitoring team).	N/A	Mentions national park and a special investigation, yet no insight to results.	Follow-up a year later from the event, still influencing behaviours.	Fascination still stands.

China Daily

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
April 3, 2020 (00.00)	News article	“Naughty giants”, “one of nature’s	Trackers are foregrounded and given protagonism.	Trackers leading the action, while herd is passively receiving those	N/A	Publishing real-time information,	Quite catastrophic portrayal (“wreaking

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
		most majestic creatures”		actions. It is about the efforts and responsibilities of task force.		immediacy social media.	havoc”) pointing out the damage they are causing.
August 6, 2020 (14.48)	Photo reportage	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
April 22, 2021 (08.08)	New release Xinhua	N/A	Unlike a year before (“wreaking havoc”), here it is about “Achievements seen in wildlife protections” (these implying humans’ successes).	Elephants triggers other outcomes and actions: event has become the “hook” to elaborate on the country’s positive efforts in wildlife conservation.	“Rare activities”	N/A	From catastrophe to achievement and success, a year gap with a completely different portrayal.
May 28, 2021 (16.17)	News article & video	N/A	Introduction of the Forest Fire Brigade (to become “elephant runners”).	Elephants were found by humans, guided and distracted by them.	N/A	As of this date, coverage increases (arrival of the herd in more densely populated areas).	N/A
May 31, 2021 (07.23)	Photo reportage	“Roaming elephants”	N/A	Elephants are the ones causing damage, whereas humans are the ones cleaning it up (who is the real hero in this story?). Emphasis on the problem of the elephants’ trek and unrequested presence.	The point out that for years they have studied elephants and noticed how “about two-thirds of them are now living outside reserves because the increasing forest canopy density has resulted in food shortages.”: Was it then completely unpredictable that this something like this would happen?	Reference to ancient past: Kunming street named “Xiangyan” (elephant eye) during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). However, if those wild giants do appear again there, they will pose a considerable problem.	Introduction of element of fame (emphasis on live stream, followers, footage...).
June 1, 2021 (08.18)	News article	Emphasis on fame of elephants	Elephants and their actions	Elephants are foregrounded and deciding their fate, yet it is a result and unfortunate adaptation and reaction to what humans have caused.	Focus on the cause, stating clearly that it is not due to the lack of experience of the leader but could be two other potential reasons.	“Continuing to march north” = regular updates on the present.	Danger and disaster vs. protection and reassurance:
June 1, 2021 (14.00)	News article	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
June 2, 2021 (07.02)	News article	“Stray animals”	Emphasis on destruction and damage.	By using the word “stray” it implies they are not in the right place but by who?	N/A	Future CTA for an emergency helpline.	As seen with the headline (“There is nothing amusing about stray animals”): seriousness vs. int. romantization
June 3, 2021 (09.02)	News article	N/A	Elephants foregrounded throughout	N/A	Elements of uncertainty: “unusual and they do not know the reason for it.”	Continuity (“now close to...”)	N/A
June 3, 2021 (13.25)	News release Xinhua	“Wandering elephants”	Focus on the task force, concern on residents.	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 4, 2021 (07.05)	News article	“Wild elephants”	Kunming (humans) foregrounded who prepare for the arrival of the elephants.	Deployment of human efforts to contain disaster.	N/A	Future CTA for better support, scientific and financial.	N/A
June 4, 2021 (07.45)	News editorial by Wei Wei (Head of Rare Animals and Plants Institute, China West Normal University)	N/A	Residents/local communities	Residents are foregrounded but to take the responsible actions in face of the elephants’ arrival.	N/A	Link to past: elephants have been criss-crossing Yunnan quite frequently in the past years.	Seriousness: Important to counteract potential misguided portrayal of this event by media/locations unfamiliar with this.
June 5, 2021 (08.38)	News article	N/A	Big city (humans) preparing for elephants’ arrival.	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 5, 2021 (17.11)	Drone footage	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 6, 2021 (13.57)	News release Xinhua	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts, continuity (“Still lingering”).	N/A
June 6, 2021 (22.57)	Video	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 7, 2021 (07.19)	News article	N/A	N/A	Anthropomorphisation: Elephants have “a strong sense of society and value the family highly”.	Key concepts like “unknown”, “unclear”. Modal verb of possibility (“guide elephant” misleading the	N/A	N/A

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
					herd could be at fault").		
June 8, 2021 (10.07)	News release Xinhua	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 9, 2021 (09.17)	News article	N/A	Emphasis to international attention.	N/A	Speculation of the cause not only a local concern but global mystery.	N/A	N/A
June 9, 2021 (15.12)	News release Xinhua & video	"China's migrating herd"	N/A	China takes ownership of these elephants, and leads/guides them.	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 10, 2021 (16.37)	News release Xinhua	N/A	Yunnan's efforts in face of this situation ('Yunnan makes efforts...')	No agency to elephants, they are being escorted/tracked/steered by monitoring group.	Unclarity to why they left	N/A	N/A
June 10, 2021 (17.04)	Photo reportage	"Pachyderm patrol"	Focus on the monitoring team at the Yunnan Provincial Forest Fire Brigade (who is the real protagonist of this story?)	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 10, 2021 (19.54)	News article	N/A	Elephant trackers who face a difficult but important task	N/A	N/A	N/A	Positive portrayal of human-animal interaction: "the task of monitoring elephants was not a predator-prey, life-or-death struggle. It was a loving interaction between man and nature."
June 11, 2021 (00.00)	News editorial	N/A	Human perception and response to this animal event: -experts' response -China's handling -Local perception -Int. media coverage	N/A	Uncertainty and challenge. Modal verbs of possibility ("it could be that...").	To be continued in the future: "Each of these comes with its own risk, uncertainty, cost and challenges which need to be evaluated further"	Focus on global interest and involvement + best practices sharing.

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June 11, 2021 (00.00)	News snippet	N/A	N/A	Elephants on the move, <u>their</u> move.	N/A	"A road trip like no other" = unique across history.	N/A
June 11, 2021 (04.36)	Video footage	"Roaming elephants"	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 11, 2021 (06.04)	Photo reportage	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 11, 2021 (06.53)	News editorial	N/A	Wildlife experts/the world praise the country's efforts	N/A	N/A	Potential to open a new chapter in conservation: "China can have a new beginning as it can come up with its own model to deal with the elephant group	Positive and celebration to lead the way in the future.
June 11, 2021 (09.37)	Video	China's elephants become "International stars"	Focus on international fame and enthusiastic response worldwide	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 11, 2021 (14.57)	Timeline	"Elephants' wonderland"	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 12, 2021 (07.59)	News article	N/A	Yunnan > elephants Behind the scene focus (protection plans, growth, harmony...)	N/A	Considering progress in wildlife protection, what does this migration say about it? Is it a wake-up call that more action/investment is needed? Same approach no longer works, we have reached a breaking point?	N/A	Positive portrayal and appraisal of Yunnan conservation efforts.
June 12, 2021 (14.41)	Photo reportage & video	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 13, 2021 (08.32)	Photo reportage & video Xinhua	"Wandering Asian elephants"	N/A	Herd seen by humans, observers vs. subjects.	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 13, 2021 (15.06)	Photo reportage	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 14, 2021 (07.31)	News article	N/A	N/A	Moving away from the human-caused narrative to	As headline suggests: "Elephants' trek	N/A	N/A

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
				humans not being the cause at all, rather the opposite, heroes almost.	unlikely linked to humans" (low certainty level)		
June 14, 2021 (09.30)	News release Xinhua	N/A	China's wildlife authorities, headquarters > elephants	China (actively) guiding elephants (passively receiving)	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 15, 2021 (09.06)	News release Xinhua	"China's famous herd"	N/A	N/A	N/A	Continuity	N/A
June 16, 2021 (00.00)	News article	"Online sensation"	Protagonism and narrative is on the elephant runners	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 16, 2021 (07.45)	Interview	N/A	Monitoring group > elephants	N/A	More and more a human story and less an animal-centred approach.	N/A	N/A
June 17, 2021 (10.34)	Photo reportage	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Continuity	N/A
June 17, 2021 (14.10)	News editorial	N/A	"China should": Need to protect this species and for China to implement social, scientific and financial measures as part of its national policy of building an ecological civilization.	China should lead the action but the recipients of these actions are multiple not only local (human) communities but also animal and other regions (neighbouring countries and global).	N/A	Importance of this event to unfold future needed actions.	Urgency, seriousness at hand
June 18, 2021 (00.00)	News article	N/A	Focus on insurance program to compensate damage	N/A	N/A	N/A	The other side of this fairy-tale like story: damage
June 19, 2021 (09.49)	News release Xinhua	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 19, 2021 (13.27)	News article	"China's migrating elephant herd"	N/A	N/A	N/A	Immediacy social media (live-streaming)	N/A
June 20, 2021 (15.43)	Photo reportage	"Yunnan's elephant migration"	Focus on fame	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 21, 2021 (00.00)	News article	N/A	The national but especially int. focus (importance on the global significance)	N/A	Foregrounding overall positive efforts, neglecting what caused this migration.	N/A	Aspect of care and of this being a real "eye-opener" event.
June 21, 2021 (09.20)	News editorial	"Jumbo trek"	Country conservation	Smart animals making decisions	Important correction on a	Connection with conservation	N/A

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				Herd reflects (indirectly) human efforts.	misguided portrayal: not migrating but dispersing	history, as a positive consequence.	
June 21, 2021 (09.37)	News article	"China's migrating herd"	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 21, 2021 (20.58)	Photo reportage	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 21, 2021 (21.56)	Episode in miniseries	"Elephant Trek"	Monitoring group and their actions, responsibilities, efforts	Elephants being saved by humans (hint to nature's dependency on manking?)	N/A	Update whereabouts	"emergency response"
June 22, 2021 (07.27)	News article	N/A	N/A	N/A	"Unlikely to return home". Modal verbs of possibility: "may have prolonged", "may be attempting"	Continuity: Experts commentary on the fact that the journey might be extended.	
June 22, 2021 (08.55)	News article	N/A	Global appreciation: creation of an artwork in London inspired by this event.	N/A	Need for more studies to understand what triggered this move.	N/A	Trek inspires hope
June 22, 2021 (09.43)	News release Xinhua	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 23, 2021 (00.00)	News article	N/A	Reflections on what the sculpture in London has raised	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 23, 2021 (13.20)	Photo reportage	"China's migrating elephant herd"	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 24, 2021 (07.24)	News article	N/A	Building a national park, expert group and research.	N/A	N/A	Connection with context (covid year).	Positivity from this seemingly negative event
June 24, 2021 (08.05)	News editorial	N/A	N/A	N/A	Real implications of an "ecological civilization", how and when to implement and develop.	Future CTA (continuous improvement of habitat quality).	N/A
June 24, 2021 (10.41)	News release Xinhua	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 25, 2021 (09.27)	Photo reportage	N/A	Human, technological response and monitoring	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

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			(everyone involved, local and experts)				
June 25, 2021 (10.34)	Video	N/A	Elephants > task force	The "Wild Asian Elephant" is the one "bringing the world together"	What triggered this movement "baffles" scientists all over the world.	N/A	N/A
June 25, 2021 (14.35)	Video	"Elephant Watch", "mysterious journey"	N/A	N/A	Uncertainty on where they are going and why	N/A	N/A
June 27, 2021 (08.40)	News release Xinhua	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 28, 2021 (10.19)	News release Xinhua	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 29, 2021 (10.06)	News release Xinhua	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 29, 2021 (22.27)	News release Xinhua	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 30, 2021 (06.48)	News article	N/A	N/A	"Rebellious male elephant" (human-like attributes)	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
July 7, 2021 (14.40)	News release Xinhua	N/A	Elephants and their location	N/A	N/A	Reporting starts to dial down.	N/A
July 7, 2021 (19.36)	News article	N/A	N/A	One single elephant transferred by humans.	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
July 7, 2021 (22.04)	Video	N/A	Male elephants	Passive on elephant male: "he was returned (by humans)", "sent back". Impersonal portrayal: "it" was returned.	N/A	N/A	N/A
July 11, 2021 (06.47)	News release Xinhua	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
July 18, 2021 (15.14)	Video	N/A	N/A	Human-like reactions (cooling off because of heat).	N/A	N/A	N/A
July 19, 2021 (07.57)	News article	N/A	Herd and their behaviour	Animals also suffer from the heat and desire to cool down (almost like humanizing them)	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A

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July 19, 2021 (10.35)	News article	N/A	Ode to the baby elephant (artistic inspiration)	Elephant trigger responses, thoughts, reflections...	N/A	N/A	N/A
July 28, 2021 (09.55)	News release Xinhua	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
August 8, 2021 (22.01)	News article	“Wandering herd”, “famous herd”, “star behemoths”	Importance of underlining the worldwide significance in the lead.	Safely returned but not by themselves	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
August 9, 2021 (08.35)	News release Xinhua	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
August 9, 2021 (10.05)	News editorial by Huang Wenbin, Beijing Regional Head of WWF China	N/A	The world and global attention over not particularly the elephants, but the local response	Elephants movement exemplifies (willingly or not) human progress.	Emphasis on ecological civilisation yet omitting to fully define “future challenges”.	Continuity and link with past and future: “Asian elephants' trek reflects environmental progress. This event not only puts in evidence the need to tackle it today but it raises another task of what we can do in the next decade”.	Positive, appraisal.
August 9, 2021 (13.39)	News article	“Elephant patrol”, “tour group”	Elephants' march	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
August 10, 2021 (00.00)	News article	N/A	N/A	Elephants going home	Justifies this case by stating that migration is in the animals' nature.	Conclusion of 17-months journey.	N/A
August 12, 2021 (07.31)	News article	N/A	Task force and its continuous efforts to protect both humans and animals	Aspect of public awareness on environmental concerns: the herd's march has helped grow public awareness about the need to protect wildlife	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
August 12, 2021 (18.39)	Photo reportage	N/A	N/A	Asian elephants are the ones to highlight conservation message	N/A	N/A	N/A
August 13, 2021 (19.52)	Photo reportage Xinhua	N/A	N/A	The elephants began this story, now it is up to China to continue it: “China to	N/A	Continuity towards the future (not the end).	N/A

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				further promote..."			
August 19, 2021 (08.15)	Photo reportage	N/A	"Helping hands" (everyone helping get the herd home)	People involved (framing it as a community effort): "joint effort", "teamwork"	N/A	N/A	N/A
August 20, 2021 (19.40)	News article	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Importance of keeping the momentum alive: Promotion of elephant protection, keeping the significance alive, not tune it down	N/A
August 30, 2021 (13.47)	News editorial by Xueli Wu (Guangdong University of Foreign Studies)	"China's herd"	Elephants foregrounded as the ones to lead and open many outcomes.	The herd "sends key environmental message" Yet, the reason of their fame is thanks to humans: "The most important reason the event landed in the spotlight was the joint efforts of the government and residents to ensure the safety of both animals and humans."	The uncertainty should not concern the cause only but rather the underlying problems (left unsaid): "While the cause of this uncommon migratory phenomenon still remains unknown, it could reflect some serious underlying environmental problems yet to be detected.	"Uncommon migratory phenomenon" compared to previous studied behaviour. Future CTA: need to develop management system in response to wildlife migrations (anticipates similar cases in the future).	Emphasis on the rightful handling of the situation, appraisal.
September 10, 2021 (17.49)	News article	"Epic journey"	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
September 11, 2021 (07.48)	News article	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts (safe return)	N/A

Global Times

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
May 28, 2021 (21.03)	News article	"Wild elephants"	Even though the headline seems to topicalize the elephants it is soon switched to foregrounding the residents who are being	Elephants seem to have agency, deciding their fate and not being delimited/guided yet by humans.	Still too early to tell what the cause was yet potential reasons are proposed (even though with a modal verb of	N/A	Focuses on: the surprise of having and seeing these animals unexpectedly in human areas, includes the excitement of the people,

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
			warned about elephants.		possibility, "may be a reason").		does mention the damage they have causes.
May 30, 2021 (07.49)	Photo reportage Xinhua	"Wild elephants"	Headline leads with elephants but once again it is switched to humans, in this case the authorities	Elephants are no longer deciding their fate, but rather being escorted and monitored by humans	N/A	"They are currently", "are now wandering" = focus on present actions.	N/A
May 30, 2021 (21.37)	News article	First time to label it as a "record journey".	Clearly foregrounds the local officials and authorities.	Local officials are presented as leading protagonists of this story to which the elephants respond to (no agency). Introduces the concept of "exodus", implying a sort of protest, a mass movement of individuals responding to something.	Level of certainty re the cause low: "The reduction of suitable habitat inside the former reserve is believed to be the root cause."	It appeals to a call to action for future action to be taken:	N/A
June 2, 2021 (22.18)	News article	"Web celebrities"	Stray elephants, bizarre event	Humans persuade and lure elephants.	N/A	N/A	N/A
June 3, 2021 (13.52)	News article	Elephant "exodus"	Human city is the focus and priority in response to this event.	Presented as an aggregation of many ("The herd"), one big entity almost that started the story with agency (they left their home, they went there...) and now their journey is defined, decided and narrated by humans. "To intrude": not welcome presence.	"May be": Changed eating patterns (they are more dependent on agricultural crops, hence why they turn to agricultural land as a new habitat: "As for why the herd made its long journey, local officials said it <u>may</u> <u>be</u> related to the alteration in the wild elephants' diet"	Future CTA: Landscape protection planning should be carried out for Asian elephant habitats.	Word choice intrusion = tension Alarming tone (need to prepare for their possible arrival and avoid any harm to both animals and humans).
June 4, 2021 (17.27)	News article	"wild elephants"	"Party chief in Kunming" and authorities in Kunming foregrounded. It is a human story.	Show of an authority action/reaction.	Preparing for something they very much unlikely will happen, yet unsure.	N/A	N/A

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
June 6, 2021 (23.45)	News release Xinhua	N/A	N/A	"To linger", "to wander": continue to be in a place longer than necessary, walking aimlessly	N/A	Continuity	N/A
June 7, 2021 (07.55)	News release Xinhua	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 7, 2021 (01.09)	News article	N/A	Elephants direct and indirect actions (e.g.: sparking discussions on wildlife protection)	Elephants moving and deciding their own course (seemingly)	Speculation and debate on the cause: still debating to why they moved to a colder habitat with less food.	"Abnormal migration" compared to previous ones.	Focus on "worldwide attention"
June 8, 2021 (09.33)	News release Xinhua	N/A	N/A	Herd "lingers", stay longer than anticipated and/or appreciated	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 8, 2021 (13.01)	Photo reportage Xinhua	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 9, 2021 (17.04)	News release Xinhua	"China's migrating elephant herd"	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 10, 2021 (21.03)	News article	N/A	N/A	Indirect actions resulting form herd's behaviour: The online sensation has raised awareness in citizens who deem this a "good opportunity to (...) learn more about animals and nature"	N/A	Update whereabouts	Potential positive outcomes: Appreciation for these animals although this has always been part of the local behaviour and tradition.
June 11, 2021 (06.26)	News article	N/A	N/A	"the herd" as if it is a big entity, almost like a concept	N/A	Update whereabouts & condition	N/A
June 11, 2021 (21.12)	News release Xinhua	"China's migrating elephants"	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 12, 2021 (08.11)	News release Xinhua	"China's migrating elephant herd"	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 13, 2021 (10.24)	Photo reportage Xinhua	"Wandering wild Asian elephant"	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 14, 2021 (17.57)	News article	"Stray wild elephants"	The herd seems to have taken ownership of the story.	No longer subjects to humans but rather nature's force (weather conditions and rain season to determine their fate).	The level of uncertainty and vagueness goes beyond the cause. It also appeals to the overall	Effect of a continuous cause, albeit positive one.	From failure to success: previous speculation that wild elephants were leaving their habitat because the

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
				“Stray wild Asian elephants”, implying undecisive movements, lost.	evolution of the event. “Unlikely to go home” = uncertainty		local ecology had been damaged, but now experts point out that the migration instead proved that Yunnan's ecology has progressed in recent years.
June 14, 2021 (07.53)	News release Xinhua	N/A	China's wildlife authorities	As the headline indicated, China (nation, humans) is the one to guide the elephants to a more suitable habitat. Elephants no longer wandering, lingering, but steered by humans.	N/A	Continuity	N/A
June 14, 2021 (15.08)	News article	“Widely-publicized rare journey”	The herd, the ‘rare’ journey	They are the attraction, the source of new income?	N/A	Continuity	Positive unrelated outcomes: Economic boost thanks to elephants’ fame.
June 15, 2021 (11.39)	News release Xinhua	“China’s famous herd”	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 15, 2021 (21.38)	News article	“Animal celebrities” “China's nationwide elephant fever”	N/A	Human-like agency and anthropomorphisation: elephants going through a “rebellious” period. “intelligent creatures were seen” → passive, seen by us, humans	N/A	Uniqueness of the event across time: “longest journey in the species’ history.”	Promising emphasis on harmony: how this case reminded public of the stillness of nature and the warmth of interspecies relationships.
June 15, 2021 (22.00)	News editorial	“Social media stars in China and around the world”	The trek and the important conversations it has opened (e.g.: need to further protect environment).	N/A	N/A	Possibility this will only increase or happen again, hence for actions now.	N/A
June 16, 2021 (08.41)	News release Xinhua	“China’s migrating elephants”	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 16, 2021 (12.41)	News article	“Stray wild Asian elephant”	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 18, 2021 (14.11)	News editorial by Ai Jun	N/A	As headline suggests (“China's care for wandering elephants mirrors	Elephants seem to be portrayed as the means to an end: the puppet being puppeteered by humans as a way to showcase the country’s	N/A	Link with context: This case could be a chance for China to redeem itself,	Elephants story might have changed (improved) the perception on

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
			adorable national image the West can't distort"), it is about how China (humans) is handling this situation not about the elephants themselves. It is about China in face of the world's perception.	positive response and actions (China's long-term relentless efforts to protect the environment and wild animals) Humans have taken ownership of the elephants' story → Chinese say we should thank the elephants for making the world finally see how adorable China is.		especially in a time of China-blaming (Covid)	China when it comes to environmental and biodiversity matters.
June 20, 2021 (01.04)	News release Xinhua	"China's migrating elephant herd"	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 20, 2021 (07.35)	News release Xinhua	N/A	About Yunnan's efforts and "relentless actions" to protect this species and their habitat	"Under Human Escort" From a human perspective and dealt by humans. Passive approach to elephants ("once the elephants are spotted").	Enigma to what caused all of this: "The reason they left their leafy habitat (...) remains an enigma."	N/A	N/A
June 20, 2021 (19.45)	News article	N/A	N/A	N/A	Uncertainty stated in the headline self ("Wandering elephant herd heads south, time and route of return uncertain")	Beginning of the end	N/A
June 20, 2021 (20.38)	Photo reportage Xinhua	"China's famous herd of wandering elephants"	The herd is foregrounded	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 21, 2021 (11.12)	News release Xinhua	"China's migrating elephant herd"	The herd is foregrounded	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
June 29, 2021 (12.11)	News release Xinhua	"China's migrating elephant herd"	The herd is foregrounded	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
July 10, 2021 (17.33)	News article	"Stray wild elephant herd"	Villagers and local communities and their amazement over the elephants (again, a human story for human consumption	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
			and enjoyment)				
July 11, 2021 (10.39)	News release Xinhua	"China's migrating elephants"	N/A	N/A	N/A	Update whereabouts	N/A
July 28, 2021 (09.36)	News release Xinhua	'China's migrating elephants"	N/A	N/A	N/A	Continuity ("keep moving")	N/A
August 8, 2021 (23.48)	News article	N/A	N/A	"The herd was monitored" (by humans)	N/A	Emphasis on conclusion of 17-month journey	N/A
August 9, 2021 (20.12)	News article	"Marvellous travel"	N/A	Mixed agency: the herd actively got back home but thanks to human intervention.	N/A	N/A	Appraisal of effective guidance of local wildfire authorities
August 12, 2021 (22.37)	News article	N/A	As headline indicates, "what the Chinese have done to protect the elephants". It is about the Chinese, not the elephants. Focus on human discussions around the elephant migration	Elephant herd subjects observed and studied by others.	This case takes part and is the centre of a discussion on climate change yet it is never mentioned nor considered that this might be a climate change induced event.	Future conversations this leads to, potential of new conservation chapter.	Positive: Celebrating elephant day by using the herd's case as an example of success.
August 13, 2021 (16.10)	News article	"China's famous herd"	N/A	N/A	N/A	Future appeal: "highly likely to migrant again," (not the end of this story, this not being just a story about a herd moving once)	N/A
October 14, 2021 (23.48)	News article	"Mammoth stars" "odyssey of the wild elephant herd" "famous herd"	Elephants runners are the protagonists and the ones to tell the story, they "recount the epic trek of mammoth stars"	A story made by them but told by others: "with those sharing their journey recounting details and international delegates praising China for its proper handling of the matter." Anthropomorphisation: Sense of family, smartness, kindness Humans paved the way for their return.	N/A	Appeal to a (human-defined) future: "We want to understand and build what they need, so in the future the wild elephants will be able to comply with the national park plan."	Positive: International praise, also during COP15.

Date	Format	Identity	Topicalization	Agency	Vagueness	Temporality	Connotation
September 20, 2022 (01.34)	News article	N/A	First it is about the elephants' return to their original home, and then about the human response and actions post-return (creation of parks and gardens).	The outcomes and actions of the story as a whole: the story reflects the way China is taking action to build a community of life together."	N/A	Back in their original home	N/A

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10.2. Graphic material

Figure 1: Roaming elephants rest near Xiangnan village, Yuxi city, Yunnan province, on June 13. [Photo by Duan Mengchao/For China Daily].

Figure 2: Photo of the printed version of the article by TIME Magazine.

Figure 3: A herd of wild elephants walk in Yimen county, Yuxi, Yunnan province, on June 16, 2021. [Photo/YUXI PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU].

Figure 4: Map illustrating the herd's route from Mengyang's sub-reserve until the outskirts of Kunming [Own production].

Figure 5: Forestry workers monitor the elephants [Photo Xinhua].

Figure 6: Firefighters set up a temporary headquarters in Xiangnan village, Yuxi, Yunnan, to monitor the elephants via drones. [Photo by Wei Xiaohao/China Daily].

Figure 7: Trucks block a road to prevent the elephants entering Yimen county, suburban Kunming, Yunnan, on June 16. [Photo by Wei Xiaohao/China Daily].

Figure 8: Screenshot of the Live Footage of the herd's movements provided by CGTN. (Source: "Live: Where is the herd of wild Asian elephants?". (2021, June). *CGTN*).

Figure 9: Aerial photo taken on June 7 shows the wild Asian elephant herd in Xiyang Yi autonomous town of Jinning district of Kunming, Yunnan province. [Photo provided by Yunnan Provincial Forest Fire Brigade].

Figure 10: A herd of wild elephants play in a small mud pool in Dalongtan township, Eshan county of Yuxi, Southwest China's Yunnan province, on June 19, 2021. [Photo/Yuxi Public Security Bureau].

Figure 11: A herd of wild elephants feeds on crops in a field in Yimen county, Yuxi, Yunnan province, on June 16, 2021. [YUXI PUBLIC SECURITY BUREAU].

Figure 12: Map of the Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve and its disconnected subreserves. Source: Su, K., Ren, J., Yang, J., Hou, Y., & Wen, Y. (2020). "Human-Elephant Conflicts and Villagers' Attitudes and Knowledge in the Xishuangbanna Nature Reserve, China". *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(23), 8910. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17238910>

Figure 13: President Xi Jinping speaks at the Cop15 media centre in Kunming in October 2021. The UN biodiversity conference has been moved to Montreal after Covid-related delays. Photograph: AFP/Getty Images.

Figure 14: Elephant runners at COP15 [Photo- Xu Liuliu/Global Times].

Figure 15: Visitors look at a picture about the migrating herd shown at Yunnan Provincial Museum [CGTN].

Figure 16: A video on the activities of a herd of wild Asian elephants that went astray in Southwest China's Yunnan Province in September is shown on a big screen at the 15th meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15), in Kunming, capital of Yunnan Province, on Monday. [Photo: Li Hao/GT].

Figure 17: Distribution areas of Asian elephants in 1975, 1990, 2005 and 2014. ArcGIS 10.2 (ESRI Ltd., CA, USA. www.esri.com) were used to analyze the remote sensing images and GIS data. Source: Liu, P., Wen,

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Figure 18: Climatic changes over Xishuangbanna. (Source: Wang, H.; Wang, P.; Zhao, X.; Zhang, W.; Li, J.; Xu, C.; & Xie, P. (2021, July 3). "What triggered the Asian elephant's northward migration across southwestern Yunnan?". *The Innovation*, 2(3)).

Figure 19: Illustration extracted from the United Nations University (UNU) – Institute for Environment and Human Security [UNU-EHS] (2022) "Interconnected Disaster Risks". Source: Authors: O'Connor, J., Eberle, C., Narvaez, L., Higuera Roa, O., Oakes, R.

Figure 20: The herd roams through a neighborhood in Shuanghe Yi Autonomous Township, Jinning District of Kunming city on June 4 [Xinhua].

Figure 21: The elephant herd. [Yang Jinghao/CGTN].

Figure 22: Roaming elephants are guided across the Yuanjiang Bridge, Yunnan province, on Aug 8. [Photo/China Daily].

Figure 23: The elephant herd wanders on a mountain ridge, looking for food, in Yuxi, Yunnan province, on Sunday. [Photo by Zhou Xin/for China Daily].

10.3. Media analysis

Chronological order per media outlet

10.3.1. CGTN

JANUARY 2020:

"Yunnan looks to boost protection of Asian elephant". (2020, January 22). *CGTN*. Retrieved from <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-01-22/Yunnan-looks-to-boost-protection-of-Asian-elephant-NsiTclTsbe/index.html>

APRIL 2020:

Fangyu, X. (2020, April 25). "Wild Asian elephants step into cropland due to continuous dry weather". *CGTN*. Retrieved January 11, 2023, from <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-04-25/Wild-Asian-elephants-step-into-cropland-due-to-continuous-dry-weather-PXEIYMRyaQ/index.html>.

"Wild Asian elephants head back to rainforest after visiting cropland". (2020, April 27). *CGTN*. Retrieved from <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-04-27/Wild-Asian-elephants-head-back-to-rainforest-after-visiting-cropland-Q1O6YoaX4I/index.html>

MARCH 2020:

Xinhua News Agency. "Wild elephants roam around village in SW China". (2020, March 19). *CGTN*. Retrieved from <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-03-19/Wild-elephants-roam-around-village-in-SW-China-OYLCTkUxiQ/index.html>

MAY 2020:

Ying, Z. (2020, May 12). "The carefree life of wild Asian elephants in SW China". *CGTN*. Retrieved from <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2020-05-12/The-carefree-life-of-wild-Asian-elephants-in-SW-China-QglR1l1pgk/index.html>

JUNE 2020:

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OCTOBER 2020:

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MAY 2021:

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“Wild elephants spotted rambling near residential complex in SW China”. (2021, May 29). *CGTN*. Retrieved from <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-05-29/Wild-elephants-spotted-rambling-near-residential-complex-in-SW-China-10EmFTOfaFy/index.html>

“Fifteen wild Asian elephants wander into China's Yuxi City”. (2021, May 30). *CGTN*. Retrieved from <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-05-30/Fifteen-wild-Asian-elephants-wander-into-China-s-Yuxi-City-10GL2csX1ll/index.html>

“Live: When will the herd of wild Asian elephants end family vocation and go home?”. (2021, May 30). *CGTN*. Yunnan, China. TV News. Retrieved from <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-05-30/Live-When-will-the-herd-of-wild-Asian-elephants-end-family-vocation--10GBweAxbS8/index.html>

Xinhua News Agency. “Wild Asian elephants migrate northward in SW China”. (2021, May 30). *CGTN*. Retrieved from <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-05-30/Wild-Asian-elephants-migrate-northward-in-SW-China-10GaWDXM0ul/index.html>

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“Wild Elephant Crisis: Wild Asian elephant herd less than 80 kilometers from downtown Kunming”. (2021, May 31). *CGTN*. Retrieved from <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-05-31/VHJhbnNjcmlwdDU1MjA3/index.html>

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JUNE 2021:

“In pictures: Herd of elephants' mystery 400 km hike continues in China”. (2021, June 1). *CGTN*. Retrieved from <https://newseu.cgtn.com/news/2021-06-01/In-pictures-Herd-of-elephants-mystery-400-km-hike-continues-in-China-10K4ruxpVBu/index.html>

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